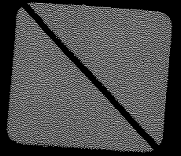


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# SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



PLUS: A DEBATE WITH THE AUTHORS OF 'THE CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA'

# INTRODUCTION

This issue opens with a two-part study of the crises in ownership and ontology created by the new information technologies. John Frow focuses on the bizarre encounter of copyright law and computer software, while Bill Nichols pursues broader questions of subjectivity and cybernetic systems. Their work returns *Screen* to concerns which grew out of the study of authorship in the '70s, notably the attempt to develop a Marxist theory of copyright legislation and its juridical subject.

In his *Ownership of the Image*<sup>1</sup>, Bernard Edelman examined the changing definitions of both the photographer and the photographed in nineteenth and twentieth century French copyright law. Until the early decades of this century, French law denied an author's right over both photography and cinema on the grounds of its mechanical, 'non-creative' nature. But with the increase in capital investment in the cinema, Edelman argued, the French courts were obliged to reduce commercial risk by assigning exclusive rights to the product. The consequence was a redefinition of the cinematic process as a creative one – a recording of an idea in sound and image – with the right of ownership vested first in the producer (as the financially responsible party) and, after subsequent struggles, 'moral' rights to recompense and reputation parcelled out among the creative personnel.

Historically, as Vincent Porter<sup>2</sup> has reminded Edelman's exponents, Anglo-American law has differed from its continental counterparts, originally defining copyright as a right to copy, a publisher's right, rather than that of an author. But this has not exempted it from the contradictions posed by successive technological developments, which as John Frow observes, complicate distinctions between 'work' and 'copy' (the player piano), between original research and 'mere' compilation (*Dun and Bradstreet*) and between receiver and transmitter (the VCR). Electronic information systems intensify

these complications by their lack of material fixity, their blurring of human and artificial agency<sup>3</sup> and their commodification of knowledge itself – hitherto protected by a legal tradition which attempted to balance an individual right of ownership against a public right to the free circulation of ideas.

Cybernetics, argues Bill Nichols, replaces mechanical reproduction with electronic simulation, *object* with *process*. In the characteristic ontology of postmodernity, the biological mother of a child is designated a surrogate for its would-be adoptive parent and weapon systems are styled to resemble video games. Human intelligence is mechanised via computer metaphor, but the resulting 'cyborg' is then re-admitted to the realm of the organic.

Both Frow and Nichols base their studies on current US copyright law. Meanwhile, a massive measure revising British legislation in this area, the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill, is currently before Parliament. As this issue goes to press, the media education lobby is hopeful that the final Act will include three significant changes in copyright provision:

1) the extension of fair dealing in regard to the right of quotation from the mass media for the purposes of private study or broadcast criticism, review or reportage.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Edelman, *Ownership of the Image*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979. See also, Paul Hirst and Elizabeth Kingdom, 'On Edelman's "Ownership of the Image"', *Screen* Winter 1979-80, vol 20 nos 3-4, pp 135-140.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Porter, 'Film Copyright and Edelman's Theory of Law', *Screen* Winter 1979-80, vol 20 nos 3-4, pp 141-147. And, in regard to independent cinema, see Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling, 'On Authorship', *Screen* Spring 1979, vol 20 no 1, pp 35-61.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London, Methuen New Accents, 1982, pp 79-83, traces a similar concern over writing back to Plato's *Phaedrus*.

2) the right to record broadcast or cable programmes off air for educational purposes without cost, unless restricted by a certified licensing scheme.

3) the right to record broadcast or cable programmes for designated non-profit archives.

We hope to analyse the broader significance of this legislation in a future issue.

The second part of this one is devoted to a debate between the co-authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Kristin Thompson, Janet Staiger and David Bordwell, who is also author of *Narration in the Fiction Film*, with Barry King, a London-based member of the *Screen* Editorial Board who recently reviewed those titles along with Edward Branigan's *Point of View in the Cinema*.

In reconsidering the arguments of two extensive studies of the fiction film, these articles range widely over questions of style, technical innovation, mode of production, narration and human cognition. At stake are the boundaries of formal difference and the dynamics of their determination, as well as the very

relevance of theories of ideology and the subject to such concerns. 3

The replies raise a number of further questions, among them the unity of the authors' work within a larger project of cinema poetics, and any corresponding (or indeed opposing) unity of approach within this journal. Similar questions are debated about the research facilities and funding available in the US and the UK, and their possible influence on national approaches to film scholarship. It is a vast and at times fiercely contested discussion, and we anticipate further contributions on the many questions it opens.

During the production of this issue we were very sorry to learn of the death of Claire Johnston, a founding figure of feminist film criticism and a valued member of the Society and the *Screen* Editorial Board over many years. We extend our sympathies to her family, and to her friends and colleagues in the field.

MANDY MERCK

# REPETITION AND LIMITATION: COMPUTER SOFTWARE AND COPYRIGHT LAW

BY JOHN FROW

## I

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<sup>1</sup> David B Hopkins, 'Ideas, Their Time Has Come: An Argument and a Proposal for Copyrighting Ideas', *Albany Law Review*, vol 46 no 2, Winter, 1982, p 453.

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THE RECENT EVOLUTION of copyright law in the United States is particularly rich in contradictions because of the pressure exerted by new information technologies and by the requirements of an information economy – that is, an economy based in the progressive commodification of information. In so far as this process is mediated through the law relating to intellectual property, it exacerbates the contradiction between the principles of limited monopoly rights and the public availability of ideas.

The increasing extension of capitalist relations of production to the forms of intellectual work (both through the integration of workers into an industrial mode of intellectual production, and in the consequent breaking down of an unmediated relation between labour and product) has made ever less tenable those categories of copyright law, such as 'author', 'work', 'copy', 'expression', etc, which have been derived from a romantic aesthetic of free creativity. Indeed, there is some pressure now from right-wing jurists for an even fuller integration of copyright law into the service of the market, through a dismantling of the fundamental doctrinal distinction between ideas and expressions. Hopkins argues, for example, that the law at present provides no protection for such things as 'a game concept, the system that goes into legal papers, or the ideas comprising the methodology or processes adopted within a computer program'<sup>1</sup>, and, more generally, that 'the very fact that ideas are free creates a disincentive to the development of ideas. It is only when people can fully exploit the benefits of their ideas and receive pro-



tection in these endeavours that they will donate the product of their work process to the public domain.<sup>2</sup>

American copyright law as it now stands protects (1) expressions of ideas in (2) works of authorship fixed in (3) copies or phonorecords. The 'copy' thus stands at the end of a double set of substance/expression relations, and it may in turn form the starting point for the production of a further chain of materialisations of the 'work'.

Title 17 of the US legal code defines 'copies' as 'material objects, other than phonorecords, in which a work is fixed by any method now known or later developed, and from which the work can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device. The term "copies" includes the material object, other than a phonorecord, in which the work is first fixed.'<sup>3</sup> In the case of a painting, for example, this object is what we would usually think of as the 'original'; the 'original' – the painting, the manuscript, the master tape – is already a 'copy' of the (immaterial) 'work'. The 'work' that is copied thus has no separate material form, and no existence prior to the moment of its fixation in the copy; but as an elaborated expression it is also different in kind from the 'ideas' it expresses. It has a peculiar mode of existence which is neither concrete nor fully abstract.

What the disjunction between work and copy here expresses is essentially the existence of two distinct sets of property rights. Rights of ownership in the 'material object', which a painter sells to the purchaser of a painting, do not necessarily carry with them the rights to make and sell reproductions of the object. The law does not think the difference between work and copy as a *temporal* disjunction, because of the legal fiction that the 'creation' of the work takes place at the moment when it is first fixed in a copy or phonorecord<sup>4</sup>; but the disjunction does mean that the 'fixing' of the work need not be singular: 'the same work may . . . be embodied in a range of "copies" including periodicals, computer punch cards, microfilm, tape recordings, and the like.'<sup>5</sup>

Neither work nor copy, however, can be defined in terms of material or structural self-identity. Rather, they are defined in relation to an intentional act, an act of human will. Thus proof of copying is not given by the simple identity of two works, since in addition a copyright holder must establish that a deliberate act of copying has taken place, or at least establish its physical possibility and the likelihood of its occurrence. Conversely, if it can be demonstrated that an independent act of creation has taken place, then two identical works may each be entitled to copyright protection. Hence Judge Learned Hand's famous dictum in *Sheldon v Metro-Goldwyn Pictures Corp* (1936):

*Borrowed the work must indeed not be, for a plagiarist is not himself pro tanto an 'author'; but if by some magic a man who had never known it were to compose anew Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn, he would be an 'author', and, if he copyrighted it, others may not copy that poem, though they might of course copy Keats's.*

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p 446.

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<sup>3</sup> *United States Code Service*, vol 17, paragraph 101.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*.

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Boorstyn, *Copyright Law*, Rochester, The Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company and Barncroft-Whitney Co, 1981, paragraph 2.4.

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Although an 'author' may not be a 'plagiarist', s/he is not defined as a pure originator. The 'productivity' component of fair use doctrine clearly recognises that textual production is a cumulative process, necessarily involving a relation to the body of preceding texts; and certain classes of work – such as a 'translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgement, condensation', or 'a work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications' may be classified both as a 'derivative work' and as an 'original work of authorship' with entitlement to copyright protection.<sup>6</sup>

These distinctions are already finely drawn; but the development in the twentieth century of mechanical and electronic technologies which multiply the number and form of the mediations involved in reproduction has made the distinction between work and copy even more problematical. One key case, which has had continuing consequences for the status of computer software, is the 1908 *White-Smith Music Publishing Co v Apollo Co*, where the court refused to recognise player pianos and the music rolls used to reproduce musical compositions as producing a 'copy' of those compositions. At issue was partly the question of whether perforations in a music roll could be considered an 'intelligible notation', but also the very possibility of distinguishing between a tune (an organisation of sounds) and its physical embodiment in sounds (the 'copy'). In rejecting this possibility the court found that the organisation of sounds produced by the player piano was the tune itself, the 'original work of authorship', rather than a secondary copy or embodiment of it.

Part of the difficulty with the distinction between work and copy is that the categories are purely positional. Thus the performance of a work can in its turn become eligible for copyright – that is, it can itself be considered an original work. One area of particular complexity in this respect is broadcast radio and television, where multiple realisations of a work may occur – in the studio, in transmission, in retransmission, and in the home or other place of reception. It is the retransmission process that has raised the most difficult, because commercially most significant, problems. Cable systems, like VCRs, have the ambivalent status of being both a reception and a retransmission apparatus, and while the 1968 Supreme Court decision on cable television upheld the operators' claim merely to be enhancing a signal, the imposition of royalties in the 1976 Copyright Act implicitly recognises that an act of reproduction does take place in cable retransmission.

If the fixing of the 'work' in the 'copy' is capable of taking a number of materially distinct forms, then it may be the case that these forms do not physically resemble each other or the 'work'. Copying, that is, need not imply iconic likeness. Thus an oral text may be copied in written form; and written texts may be reproduced as a set of electronic impulses, or in the medium of film. It is at this point that the distinction between work and copy shades off into that between ideas and their expression. This is clearly evident in the case of those practical schemata that we might call

'scores', where an act of realisation can be thought either as a copy of a work or as a simple use of unprotected ideas. The following of a recipe in cooking a meal, for instance, could be thought of as a performance equivalent in kind to the following of a musical score, but only the latter is protected as a 'work'; the recipe is unprotected because it is categorised as an 'idea' (a 'method' or an 'art'). Similarly, architectural blueprints have an ambivalent status as either ideas or the expression of ideas. In the USA, the construction of a building in accordance with a design is understood as an expression of the ideas contained in the design; there is, therefore, little protection for anything but the material form of the design, except in the case of decorative additions.<sup>7</sup> In the UK, by contrast, the building may be thought of as a *copy* of the blueprint, and this means that the design is given much greater solidity as an 'expression' (and so as a 'work' that can be protected).<sup>8</sup>

The basic purpose of copyright law is at once to restrict the completely free circulation of intellectual products, and to ensure the free accessibility of any 'idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery' – that is, of any 'intellectual conception apart from the thing produced'<sup>9</sup>. The distinction is clearly problematical, however, both in its attempt to protect expressions of ideas without implicating the ideas themselves, and in its implicit attribution of an ontological status to the two terms. Judge Learned Hand put concisely the dilemma of the necessity and the impossibility of the distinction in his formulation of an abstraction test:

*Upon any work, and especially upon a play, a great number of patterns of increasing generality will fit equally well as more and more of the incident is left out. The last may perhaps be no more than the most general statement of what the play is about, and at times might consist only of its title; but there is a point in this series of abstractions where they are no longer protected, since otherwise the playwright could prevent the use of his 'ideas', to which, apart from their expression, his property is never extended. Nobody has ever been able to fix that boundary, and nobody ever can.*<sup>10</sup>

The corollary that Learned Hand doesn't draw here is that every level of abstraction functions as the 'idea' in relation to all less abstract levels; and that any level can thus function either as that of 'ideas' or of 'expression', depending on its relation to other levels of abstraction.

This fundamental aporia gives rise to recurrent ambiguities. Musical works, for example, can exist in the form either of written notation or of a 'phonorecord', that is, the fixation of a performance. The latter can represent two distinct types of copyrightable work: a musical composition, or a particular embodiment of the musical composition in sound. The performance can thus either be equivalent to a notation, or it can be the realisation of a notation. In the case of the musical composition, what is copyrightable is an organisation of sounds, not a particular realisation of them. 'Sounds' are thus understood as immaterial,

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<sup>7</sup> Neil Boorstyn, *op cit*, paragraph 2.25.

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<sup>8</sup> *LB Plastics v Swish Products* (1979), cited in Christopher J Millard, *Legal Protection of Computer Programs and Data*, London, Sweet and Maxwell, 1985, p 18.

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<sup>9</sup> *United States Code Service*, vol 17, paragraph 101.

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<sup>10</sup> *Nichols v Universal Pictures Corp* (1930).

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<sup>11</sup> Neil Boorstyn, *op cit*, paragraph 2.9.

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<sup>12</sup> *Sheldon v Metro-Goldwyn Pictures, Inc* (1936); *Universal Pictures Co v Harold Lloyd Corp* (1947); *Hoehling v Universal City Studios, Inc* (1980).

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<sup>13</sup> *Warner Bros Pictures, Inc v Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc* (1954).

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<sup>14</sup> Neil Boorstyn, *op cit*, paragraph 2.22, citing *Herbert Rosenthal Jewelry Corp v Kalbakian* (1971); cf *Baker v Selden* (1879).

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<sup>15</sup> *Synercom Technology, Inc v University Computing Co* (1979).

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abstract, and it is arguable that, in so far as the terms retain any meaning, copyright here resides in an 'idea' rather than an 'expression'. In the case of the performance, by contrast, it is a particular material realisation of these sounds (but not the 'tangible medium of expression') which is subject to copyright – and there can thus be multiple copyrights in authorised performances of a single work. The concepts of 'sound' and 'performance' can therefore represent both a content plane and an expression plane. A similar ambiguity holds in relation to pantomimes and choreographic works, which 'can be fixed in any tangible medium of expression such as film, video tape, dance notation (Laban system), diagram, or verbal description'<sup>11</sup>, and where, as well as being equivalent forms of notation of an 'idea', any one of these could act as the 'expression' or realisation of any other.

Literary works are somewhat more amenable to the distinction between ideas and expressions than are nonverbal scores, since the operations of paraphrase and summary which underlie it originate in literary and philosophical pedagogies. Here the relevant distinctions are between an outline or theme or locale or generic plot structure (the *scène à faire*), on the one hand, and a 'distinctive treatment' of these on the other.<sup>12</sup> Characters may be afforded protection if they exist in visual or graphic form and can be held to embody both physical and conceptual characteristics, but literary characters are usually held to be an abstractable element of content. The test used in the 1954 'Sam Spade' case was that 'unless the character really constitutes the story being told' and is not 'only the chessman in the game of telling the story he is not within the area of protection afforded by the copyright'<sup>13</sup>. In theoretical terms the distinctions being made here are untenable; but what they seem to reflect is an identification of 'ideas' with verbal structure and of 'expression' with the iconic or the visual.

Copyright doctrine does at times recognise that the distinction between ideas and expression cannot be universally drawn. In cases involving such things as blank accounting forms which are an integral part of a book-keeping system, the principle is that where an 'art' (a system, an idea, a method) cannot be used without copying, then copying for such 'use' is no infringement (although copying an expression for the purpose of 'explanation' would be); 'where the idea and its expression are indistinguishable, this inseparability will permit copying of the expression. Otherwise "protecting the expression in such circumstances would confer a monopoly of the idea . . . free of the conditions and limitations imposed by the patent law."<sup>14</sup> This should mean, however, that no copyright protection can be afforded where ideas and expression fully merge. Certainly there has been a ruling to this effect in the case of computer software<sup>15</sup>; and it is arguable that it would apply to all iconic expressions, and certainly to those which are non-figurative (this is perhaps the reason why such expressions can receive additional protection as 'works of art').

The case of cartography can usefully help extend the analysis of these

categories. Here the problem is that the more accurate maps become, the more they will resemble each other, and it would seem, on the face of it, difficulty to grant copyright to two more or less identical maps. A number of court decisions since the last war therefore began to introduce the criterion of novelty in order to deny copyright to maps.<sup>16</sup>

Copyright doctrine requires, however, only that works of authorship be original; and this is explicitly distinguished from novelty.<sup>17</sup> The criterion of originality demands no more than that the work display 'something irreducible, something which is one man's alone'<sup>18</sup>. This means that what is protected is not distinctiveness of expression – not an inherent difference from other expressions – but only (as with the text that re-produces, without copying, the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn') whatever distinctiveness derives from the originality of an act of authoring.

Authorship as origin is, then, the most fundamental category of copyright law, in relation to which all other categories are secondary. It is the principle that founds both the work and the copy in their respective acts; both the idea and its expression. But this principle in turn requires further analysis.

The concepts of work and author are in a tautological relation to each other. A work of authorship is anything which is the product of an author, whereas "author", in a constitutional sense, means "he to whom anything owes its origin; originator; maker"<sup>19</sup>. This tautology is not purely uninformative, however, because it means that a work can always be traced back to an originary principle, and that it is this principle which defines the specificity of the work. Thus various judicial decisions have held 'that authorship implies that there has been put into a production something meritorious from the author's own mind; that the product embodies thought of the author, as well as the thought of others; and that it would not have found existence in the form presented, but for the distinctive individuality of mind from which it sprang'<sup>20</sup>.

Authorship is thus a general principle of differentiation; but because this principle can only readily be grasped in terms of differentiations between works, the concept of originality has been defined in two slightly different ways. In the first, the 'something irreducible' that marks originality is located in the work itself; the law is interpreted as making a minimal demand for some more than 'merely trivial' variation to distinguish the work from other works.<sup>21</sup> Because this is a minimal requirement, however, 'copyrighted matter need not be strikingly unique or novel, and any distinguishable variation resulting from an author's independent creative effort will suffice.'<sup>22</sup> Thus slight changes in appearance from the products of competitors have been held sufficient to attract copyright protection to dolls or stuffed animals, or to a sketch based on Paddington Bear. Moreover, the 'distinguishable variation' need not even be perceptible to an untrained observer. The Court in *Gracen v Bradford Exchange* (1983) commented that 'artistic originality may inhere in a detail, a nuance, a shading too small to be apprehended by a judge'; and further that

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<sup>16</sup> John F Whicher, 'Originality, Cartography, and Copyright', *New York University Law Review* no 38, 1963, pp 283ff.

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<sup>17</sup> *Lin-Brook Builders Hardware v Gertler* (1965).

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<sup>18</sup> *Bleistein v Donaldson Lithographing Co* (1903).

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<sup>19</sup> *Burrow-Giles Lithographic Co v Sarony* (1884); *Goldstein v California* (1973).

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<sup>20</sup> *National Telegraph News Co v Western Union Telegraph Co* (1902).

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<sup>21</sup> *Kamar International, Inc v Russ Bessie and Co* (1981).

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<sup>22</sup> *American Jurisprudence* vol 18, 2d, paragraph 19.

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<sup>23</sup> *Josie Gracen v The Bradford Exchange* (1983). The judge in the case was the 'law and economics' theorist Richard Posner.

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<sup>24</sup> RF Whale and Jeremy J Phillips, *Whale On Copyright*, 1971, rpt Oxford, ESC Publishing Limited, 1983, p 39.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p 21.

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<sup>26</sup> *Nimmer on Copyright*, cited in Neil Boorstyn, *op cit*, paragraph 2.12.

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since a contemporary school of art known as 'Super Realism' attempts to make paintings that are indistinguishable to the eye from colour photographs, and these paintings command high prices, buyers must find something 'original' in them. The court further noted that since much Renaissance painting is meticulously representational, it is therefore in a sense (but not an aesthetic sense) less 'original' than Cubism or Abstract Expressionism.<sup>23</sup>

But of course the concept of originality does not depend on the relation between signifier and signified; and this reading seems to me to demonstrate the limits of this first line of argument.

The second way of defining originality is without reference to the status of the product. Whale puts it this way: 'Originality is not to be equated with the creation of something which had not hitherto existed; it is the word used to describe the causal relationship between an author and the material form in which a work is embodied.'<sup>24</sup> This definition of originality as a causal relationship has the advantage of being able to explain certain apparent anomalies in copyright law, above all the importance given to the moment and the process of fixation – of material realisation – rather than the moment and process of creation. (Thus, for example, 'the "author" of a photograph is the owner of the film upon which it is taken; and if a musician composes an impromptu tune which another records, it is the person upon whose tape the recording is made who becomes first owner of copyright in the sound recording.'<sup>25</sup>) It helps explain, too, the distinction made in relation to the separate copyright category of the 'work of art', which requires both originality and 'some creative authorship in its delineation or form', where, as Nimmer puts it, 'creativity refers to the nature of the work itself, originality refers to the nature of the author's contribution to the work'.<sup>26</sup>

This conception of originality is at once broader, in that it refers to persons other than the 'creator' of the work, and narrower, in that it excludes the nature of the work itself from consideration except in so far as this is the effect of its origin. Again, however, the concept can be understood in two rather different ways, reflecting a fundamental ambiguity in the social function of copyright law. These are, briefly, in terms of an investment of capital, or of an investment of labour.

On the one hand, ever since its origins in the 1709 Statute of Queen Anne, which protected the commercial exploitation of printed books, copyright law has vested the right of reproduction in copyright owners rather than directly in authors. With the industrialisation of the production of information the non-coincidence between the two has become commercially crucial. Cornish notes that the British Copyright Act of 1911

*gave the producers of sound recordings their own exclusive right to prevent reproductions of their recordings (and, as the courts later held, also to prevent public performances of them). The right was indiscriminately labelled copyright, even though it was conferred, not upon the executant artist whose per-*

formance was recorded, but upon the business which organized the recording.<sup>27</sup>

And Brecht has written extensively on the subordination of the 'author' and the author's property rights to the economic requirements of the film industry, in such a way that the representative of capital, the producer, effectively takes over the author function for legal purposes.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, copyright doctrine has often taken the approach of directly protecting an investment of labour rather than the work which is the ostensibly protected object. This has been the case, for example, with works such as computer databases and compilations where there is no 'organisation of ideas' to protect. Thus the Court in *National Business Lists v Dun and Bradstreet, Inc* (1982) decided that

*compilations such as Dun and Bradstreet's have value because the compiler has collected data which otherwise would not be available. The compiler's contribution to knowledge normally is the collection of the information, not its arrangement. If his protection is limited solely to the form of expression, the economic incentives underlying the copyright law are largely swept away.*

Similarly, in the case of cartography the possibility of protection of virtually identical maps is seen to reside in the labour of production which has gone into them. There is indeed debate about whether consulting and conflating a number of previous maps constitutes an appropriate kind and degree of work, or whether a cartographer must actually undertake research in the field; but in either case the category of originality is reduced to labour. As Whicher writes: 'when the creative process is re-examined by the wisdom of judicial hindsight, it is, like a conjuror's trick that has been explained to the children, almost always a disappointment. There is, we discover, no magic to it after all. It's only work.'<sup>29</sup>

What this might mean is that the concept of originality, this most fundamental category of the copyright system, can be rethought in materialist terms. The 'causal relationship between an author and the material form in which a work is embodied' would be an investment of labour power. Understood as work, the concept of authorship could then be freed of its exclusively individualistic connotations: the author function (which would be a moment in a system of production) could equally be performed by a team, by a production crew, by a group of collaborators; and the ideology of free creativity could be displaced, but in terms that are derived internally (if critically) from the existing structure of copyright law.

## II

That a set of economic categories, and the ideological contradictions attendant upon them, can so readily be derived from the structure of copyright doctrine bears witness to its practical closeness to economic

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<sup>27</sup> WR Cornish, *Intellectual Property: Patents, Copyright, Trade Marks and Allied Rights*, London, Sweet and Maxwell, 1981, pp 299-300.

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<sup>28</sup> Bertold Brecht, 'Der Dreigroschenprozess', *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst I*, *Gesammelte Werke*, 18, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1967. There is a paraphrase and commentary on this essay in John Frow, 'Film, Commodity Production and the Law: Brecht's "Sociological Experiment"', *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol 2 no 1, May, 1984, pp 3-22.

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<sup>29</sup> John F Whicher, *op cit*, p 295.

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processes and economic contradictions. The specificity (the 'autonomy') of copyright doctrine is not opposed to, but is precisely the effect of, its continuous mediation of antagonistic economic and social interests.

The most acute provocation to the coherence of copyright theory has come in the last two decades from the development of electronic information storage and retrieval systems which, in vastly multiplying the possibilities of deployment of complex bodies of information, have similarly expanded the industrial importance of the control of information and have increased the stakes in its ownership and protection.

There are significant difficulties, however, in applying traditional conceptions of intellectual property to electronic systems. Most information stored electronically may, for example, never be expressed in a permanent fixed form but will be used and stored in a form which, like a television display, is transient and would therefore not attract copyright protection. Information stored and modified within an electronic network with multiple access may be shaped and reshaped in such a way that it is difficult to determine an 'author'. Programs may exist in a form which is not intelligible to a human user, but is designed only for interaction with a machine (and machines may in turn have the capacity to modify the program). And information in electronic form may be 'stolen' by means of a transfer which involves no alienation of property; proof of theft may therefore be extremely difficult, or it may be trivial, if what is stolen is deemed to be, say, a print-out rather than the information it contains – which may in any case have no easily assignable value. Moreover, there is a problem with the apparent solution to this, which is (as Posner and other 'law and economics' theorists do) to understand intellectual property and its protection by direct analogy with tangible property. Any such solution plays down the contradiction between rights of exclusive use and the social interest in keeping information in the public domain.

Some of these difficulties are resolved by the 1976 Copyright Act's careful wording of the fixation requirement to protect 'original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression, now known or later developed, from which they can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device'<sup>30</sup>, and by the amendment of the Act's definitional section in 1980 by the Computer Software Protection Act to include a definition of a computer program as 'a set of statements or instructions to be used directly or indirectly in a computer in order to bring about a certain result'<sup>31</sup>. In addition, the House Report on this legislation made it clear that, as provided for in Section 102(b), which bars copyright protection for ideas, procedures and methods of operation, 'copyright in a computer program does not extend protection to the methodology or processes adopted by the programmer. Only the expression adopted by the programmer is protectible, and not the methods or processes embodied in the program.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *United States Code Service*, vol 17, paragraph 102(a).

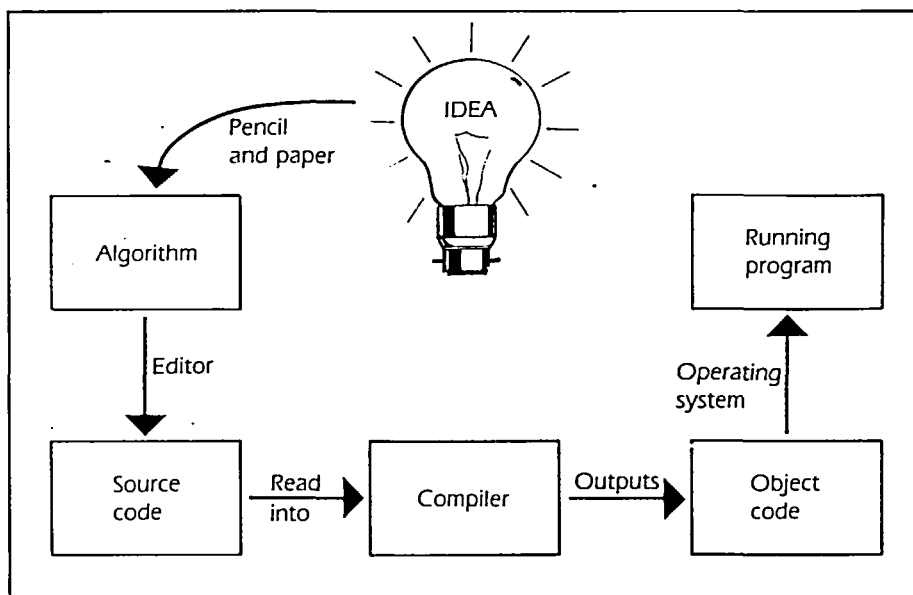
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<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 101.

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<sup>32</sup> p 54.





Nevertheless, these stipulations still leave a number of obstacles to interpretation. These concern, in particular, the question of whether protection should be available for programs in object code (that is, programs written in a form which translates a programming language, or source code, into a machine-readable form), and for the operating programs which control the hardware functions, and which would, therefore, seem to be equivalent to machine parts and so eligible for patent rather than copyright protection; but which are in practice often hard to distinguish from the application programs that produce copyrightable output.

'Idea' or 'expression'?  
Diagram of the translation process in computer programming.

There are two contradictory arguments, which don't quite meet head-on, in play here. On the one hand, programs in object code and application programs are thought to be fully protected by the Act's use of the word 'directly' to describe the use of instructions in a computer. On the other hand, it is argued that it is not possible to differentiate 'ideas' from 'expressions' at the level of the object code, and that either the present Act, or present interpretations of the Act, have gone too far in restricting the availability of information. A couple of key cases may serve to illustrate what is at issue here.

*Synercom Technology, Inc v University Computing Co* (1978, 1979) involved a suit for copyright infringement of instruction manuals and input formats used with a computer program designed to solve certain engineering problems. The central question in the case, relating only to the input formats, was 'whether [the defendant] plagiarized Synercom's idea or its expression. If the idea is the sequence and ordering of data, there was no infringement. If sequencing and ordering of data was, however, expression, it follows that [defendants's] preprocessor program infringed. . . .' This raises the further problem that 'if sequencing and ordering is expression, what separable idea is expressed?' The court

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<sup>33</sup> cf Richard H Stern, 'Another Look at Copyright Protection of Software: Did the 1980 Act do Anything for Object Code?', *Computer/Law Journal*, vol 3 no 1, Fall, 1981, pp 16-17: 'To be protected under copyright law, an alleged copy must be intended to communicate some message intelligible to human beings, even if they need a machine to aid in the communication. That an object intended for a utilitarian purpose may be made to disgorge something intelligible to human beings if placed in a proper machine is probably insufficient. By these criteria, object code is not a copy of a work of authorship, and is thus not directly protected by copyright, nor indirectly protected under the theory that it is an infringement of a copyright based in the source program.'

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finally held that the input format was in fact the expressed idea, which could, therefore, be freely copied.

*Data Cash Systems, Inc v JS and A Group, Inc* (1979, 1980) followed this ruling to hold that an object code could not be copyrighted. The case involved a computer program that instructed a computer how to play chess. The instructions were translated into programming language (the source program) and then into machine language (the assembly program). The assembly program in turn was used to generate the object program, or Read Only Memory (ROM), which directly commands a series of electrical impulses and which is integrated with the computer's circuitry. The Court held that the ROM was 'a mechanical tool, or a machine part, or the mechanical embodiment of the source program, but not a copy of it', and so not a 'writing'. The copyright protection afforded by the 1976 Copyright Act was therefore held to apply to computer programs in their flow chart, source, and assembly phases, but not in their ROM or object phase.<sup>33</sup>

What is in question in these and similar cases is the process of translation between different levels of the computational process, and hence the more general problem of distinguishing ideas and expressions. Let me define these translation processes schematically:

- (1) from one high-level language to another. Here, the judge in *Synercom* ruled that 'it is as clear an infringement to translate a computer program from, for example, FORTRAN to ALGOL, as it is to translate a novel or play from English to French. In each case the substance of the expression (if one may speak in such contradictory language) is the same between original and copy, with only the external manifestation of the expression changing.'
- (2) from flow chart to source code. The same judge felt that this would equally constitute an infringement of copyright; but he drew the line at granting protection for
- (3) translation from a general statement of the program to a source code:

*Here the similarity to literary translation ends. The preparation of a computer program in any language from a general description of the problem to be solved... is very dissimilar to the translation of a literary work, or to the translation of a program from one language to another. In most cases, the formulation of the problem in sufficient detail and with sufficient precision to enable it to be converted into an unambiguous set of computer instructions requires substantial imagination, creativity, independent thought, and exercise of discretion, and the resulting program can in no way be said to be merely a copy or version of the program statement. The program and the statement are so different, both in physical characteristics and in intended purpose, that they are really two different expressions of the same idea, rather than two different versions of the same expression.*

- (4) from source code to object code. Perhaps the most forceful arguments here are those made in 1979 by Commissioner Hersey in his

dissenting report to the National Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works (CONTU). Hersey's view is that, unlike sets of instructions, 'in the case of computer programs *the instructions themselves eventually become an essential part of the machinery that produces the results*'<sup>34</sup> and 'a program, once it enters a computer and is activated, does not communicate information of its own, intelligible to a human being. It utters work.'<sup>35</sup> The proper analogy for a computer program is not with a film or a phonorecord, but with such things as magnetised bank cards, or a cam (a gearing device) that instructs other machinery. Above all, Hersey stresses that programs are neither 'works' nor 'copies': 'a program, when keyed or run into a computer, is transformed by a compiler program into a purely machine state. The term *copy* is meaningless for the reason that in this transformation the means of expression of the original work become totally irrelevant. All that matters is the program's functional use.'<sup>36</sup> If this is arguably true of a source program or code, it is *a fortiori* arguably true of an object code. Thus the judge in *Data Cash* argued that, 'by analogy with a building constructed from architectural plans, object code constituted the physical embodiment of a computer program. Just as, under American law, a building is not a "copy" of its plans, so too a ROM is not a copy of a source program', and so does not qualify for the status of a 'writing'.<sup>37</sup>

The relations at work in these four instances are those between expressions; between ideas and expressions; and between abstract and concrete forms of an expression (with the complication of a Hjelmslevian distinction, in (1), between the form and the substance of an expression). It is clear that it is the fourth class, the relations between source code and object code, that resists explanation in terms of the traditional categories; and subsequent rulings have tended either to extend a blanket protection to object code, or to draw the line between idea and expression pragmatically, taking into account the balance between competition and protection. *Apple Computer, Inc v Franklin Computer Corp* (1980, 1982) is a particularly interesting example of the interpretive dilemma posed to the courts, since it produced diametrically opposed readings in the district court hearing and on appeal. The district court found that 'it is not clear whether the program-designer's idea of the operating system program, the source program, or the ROM is the "original work of authorship."' It is not surprising that this should be hard to determine, because at each stage major transformations in the structure of the "program" take place.' The judge decided that, rather than understanding object code as a 'language of description', 'it may be more accurate to say that operating systems are an essential element of the machine, if not an essential part of the machine that makes it work. Similarly, it may be more accurate to say that object code in its binary form or chip form is a useful version of the machine's electrical pulse.' The Court of Appeals reversed this decision, however, to hold that object code could be afforded protection as a 'literary work': 'The court rejected the defendant's argument that the ROM-embedded object code

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<sup>34</sup> *Final Report of the National Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works*, Washington, Library of Congress, 1979, p 28. (Italics as in original.)

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p 29.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p 32.

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<sup>37</sup> Christopher J Millard, p 38.

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<sup>38</sup> Anderson L Baldy III, 'Computer Copyright Law: An Emerging Form of Protection for Object Code Software After "Apple v Franklin"', *Computer/Law Journal*, vol 5 no 2, Fall, 1984, p 248.

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<sup>39</sup> WR Cornish, *op cit*, p 435.

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<sup>40</sup> *Apple Computer, Inc v Computer Edge Pty Ltd and Suss* (1984), cited in Christopher J Millard, *op cit*, p 71.

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<sup>41</sup> cf Christopher J Millard, *op cit*, pp 42-43.

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<sup>42</sup> Glenn J MacGrady, 'Protection of Computer Software - An Update and Practical Synthesis', *Houston Law Review*, vol 20 no 4, July, 1983, p 1046.

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<sup>43</sup> *Final Report of the National Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works*, p 26.

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p 34.

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was an uncopyrightable idea, noting that since other object code programs could be written to perform the same functions, Apple's object code was merely an expression of the idea. . . .'<sup>38</sup>

Cornish has suggested that 'the computer's work of "translating" the program from a high-level to a machine language is a separate copyright activity'.<sup>39</sup> An Australian court, dealing with a parallel case, decided that object codes are protected as 'adaptations of the protected source codes', that is, as 'translations'.<sup>40</sup> And some recent findings in relation to video games have concluded that ROMs constitute a 'tangible medium' for the fixing of expressions of ideas.<sup>41</sup> This plethora of different solutions perhaps indicates that there is no good solution to the problem. That it is not a marginal problem but absolutely central to the question of protection of computer software is indicated by the argument made in *Williams v Artic* (1982) that to exclude object code from protection 'would afford an unlimited loophole by which infringement of a computer program is limited to copying of the computer program text but not to duplication of a computer program fixed on a silicon chip'. In practical terms this means that the protection extended to one level of coding can be thwarted simply by copying directly from the level of the object code.

It is in line with this that MacGrady argues for the inadequacy of existing copyright protection for computer programs, pointing out that 'there is a crucial distinction between the design or algorithm of a program and the coding of a program. Copyright law will protect only the particular code expression chosen by the coding programmer or a coding expression substantially similar thereto; it will not protect the design itself'.<sup>42</sup> Others, however, have warned against a tendency on the part of both legislators and courts to afford precisely such a protection to design or 'ideas'. In his concurring opinion for the CONTU report Nimmer wrote: 'What is most troubling about the Commission's recommendation of open-ended copyright protection for all computer software is its failure to articulate any rationale which would not equally justify copyright protection for the tangible expression of any and all original ideas'<sup>43</sup>; and Hersey bluntly stated that the Commission 'may well have opened the way for covert protection, in the name of copyright, of the underlying mechanical idea or ideas of a program, rather than of its original means of expression'<sup>44</sup>.

There is another dimension to the question of object code, however, which may be equally significant; it concerns its status as a non-human communication. Since computer programs are usually written in a source code and then compiled by means of a separate program into object code, there is a question as to whether the program is in fact authored by a person rather than by a machine. Computers have been used extensively in graphic design, in musical composition, and in the production of written texts. In the case of minimal human intervention, who should be considered their 'author' for copyright purposes? More importantly, by what criteria do we distinguish between human and

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Rem *****
Rem * THE PUZ picture jigsaw by: Stuart W. Booth &
Rem * David W. Ratcliffe
Rem * August 1987
Rem *****
Rem * GFA Basic stores a menu bar as a predefined string array.
Rem * It then uses the array number of the string to indicate which menu
Rem * choice has been selected.
Rem *****
Dim A$(23)
A$(0)=" Desk "
A$(1)=" About THE PUZ "
A$(2)="-----"
A$(3)="1"
A$(4)="2"
A$(5)="3"
A$(6)="4"
A$(7)="5"
A$(8)="6"
A$(9)=" "
A$(10)=" Options "
A$(11)=" Load MEO picture "
A$(12)=" Load DEGAS picture "
A$(13)=" Start THE PUZ "
A$(14)="-----"
A$(15)=" Quit "
A$(16)=" "
A$(17)=" Help "
A$(18)=" Loading picture "
A$(19)=" Starting THE PUZ "
A$(20)=" Moving pieces "
A$(21)=" Quitting "
A$(22)=" Statistics "
Rem *****
Rem * The menu is 'switched on' by calling Menu with the desired string
Rem *****
Menu A$( )
Menu Off
Setcolor 15,0,0,0
Rem *****
Rem * The 'On Menu Gosub' is used whenever a menu choice is selected.
Rem * this then calls the Procedure INFO which determines which choice was
Rem * selected and calls the relevant procedure.
Rem *****
On Menu Gosub Info
Do
  If Chosen$=False
    Menu 13,2
  Endif
  On Menu
Loop
Procedure Info
  Flag$=False
  Value=Menu(0)
  If Value=1
    Alert 1," THE PUZ|By D Ratcliffe and S Booth| Written in GFA
Basic| August 1987",1," OK ",B
  Endif
  If Value=11 Or Value=12
    @Load_picture(Value)
  Endif
  If Value=13
    @Jumble
  @main

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'The PUZ': program for an Atari ST computer game.

artificial intelligence for copyright purposes?

Millard points out that, not only can computers produce output which is unpredictable and which can thus to some extent 'emulate the

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher J Millard, p 26.

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, pp 26-27.

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp 27-28.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p 28.

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp 28-29.

vagaries and spontaneity of the human brain'<sup>45</sup>, they can also simulate 'free will' in their ability to avoid predictability and determinism – for example, by selecting random numbers in an infinite progression, and using these (for example) for the production of musical texts. Millard follows Butler in suggesting four possible responses to this question. They are:

(1) disallow copyright completely; (2) give authorship and copyright to the computer and its software or find authorship 'shared' between the A[r]tificial I[n]telligence software and a human; (3) settle copyright upon the owner of the underlying AI software or the machine owner; or (4) create a fictional human author and assign its copyright to the AI software owner, the problem-specifier or the computer owner either individually, jointly or in part.<sup>46</sup>

To these, Millard adds the option favoured by the 1976 UK Whitford Committee, of granting copyright to the person who provides the data, alone or jointly with the owner of the AI software; and the option favoured by the 1981 Green Paper *Reform of the Law Relating to Copyright, Designs and Performers' Protection*, of granting copyright to the person responsible for running the data through the programmed computer.

All of these options are problematical. The first leaves the work unprotected. The second (machine or shared human and machine ownership) 'would necessitate absurd legal gymnastics to accommodate established copyright principles. For example, how long should a computer be deemed to live for the purpose of fixing the term of protection for a work? Moreover, how could a computer assign or otherwise administer its rights and how should it be rewarded for its "creative effort?"'<sup>47</sup> The third option of awarding copyright to the owner of the software or hardware 'might be effectively to grant a monopoly over a process for producing a vast number of different works', but also, like the last two options, it might fail to establish a 'creative link'.<sup>48</sup>

It is the legal fiction of the fourth option, then, that Millard concludes by finding most attractive. This option, of 'creating a fictional author and assigning his or her copyright to other parties', has the advantage that it 'both ensures protection without violating the concept of creativity as a distinctively human endeavour, and awards copyright protection to human beneficiaries'<sup>49</sup>.

Clearly it takes some rather hard work to preserve the conceptual priority of human creativity here. In fact, unlike most European law, where authors must be natural persons, Anglo-American law allows legal entities (corporations or partnerships, for example) to hold copyright as an author. The legal and commercial conditions for dropping the insistence on individual human creativity as the source of copyright are fully in place, and the fiction is fully recognisable as such.

What the fiction screens is the fact that copyright is part of a system of

commodity production in which reproduction rights play a major part; and that computer software is a significant component of this system. One commentator put the number of programs written daily in the United States at 15,000<sup>50</sup>, and the International Data Corporation estimated that in 1980 there were more than 4,300 companies in the software industry, with revenues of 13.14 billion dollars rising to 33.8 billion dollars in 1984.<sup>51</sup> This market is increasingly coming to be dominated by large corporations. Hence Commissioner Hersey's expression of concern at the pressures for an extension of the copyright: 'Is it not evident', he wrote, 'that the big companies want, by availing themselves of every possible form of protection, to lock their software into their own hardware, while the independents want to be able to sell their programs for use in all the major lines of hardware?'<sup>52</sup> And in fact there have been significant extensions of the copyright and kindred areas of law as a result of such pressures in recent years, not only to protect computer software but to protect such things as the mask-work used in the production of silicon chips, or new plant varieties. At the same time, the possibilities of computer crime – embezzlement, piracy of software and data, theft of computer time, and sabotage – have increased exponentially, and in ways that existing intellectual property law is not fully adequate to prevent. De Sola Pool and Solomon identify the dilemma as this: 'what protects the author or publisher is physical control of the text, for there is no count of its reproduction once it is out of his hands.'<sup>53</sup> The problem of control is exacerbated in the international marketplace, and it is with the question of transborder data flows that some of the most severe contradictions in the commodification of information come to light. Paradoxically, these involve a commitment to 'free trade' on the part of the countries and the transnational corporations with dominance in the international information industry, and a commitment to protectionist policies (privacy regulation, import controls, customs tariffs on data) on the part of Third World countries.<sup>54</sup> The struggle is one for control of a scarce commodity; but the concept of scarcity is inherently contradictory in this context.

The contradiction arises from two features of an economy which is increasingly based on the commodification of information. The first is the augmented importance of information as a resource input to production – that is, the increase in the share of cultural and especially scientific capital in the organic composition of capital. Information technology, says Locksley, 'enables a greater commercialization of culture where culture is not only a commodity but reinforces the conditions of general commodity production'<sup>55</sup>, and it 'is the instrument that allows the resource and commodity of information to be developed and gain ascendancy. The current phase of capitalist development is one characterized by the elevation of information and its associated technology into the first division of key resources and commodities. Information is a new form of capital.'<sup>56</sup> As such, it is characterised by a transition from open,

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<sup>50</sup> Walter E Schmidt, 'Legal Proprietary Interests in Computer Programs: The American Experience', *Jurimetrics*, vol 21 no 4, Summer, 1981, pp 345-346.

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<sup>51</sup> Glenn J MacGrady, *op cit*, p 1033.

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<sup>52</sup> *Final Report of the National Commission*, p 36.

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<sup>53</sup> I de Sola Pool and R Solomon, 'Intellectual Property and Transborder Data Flows', *Stanford Journal of International Law* 16, 1980, p 121.

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<sup>54</sup> Sol Glasner, 'Multinational Corporations and National Sovereignty', in Anne W Branscomb (ed), *Toward a Law of Global Communications Networks*, The Science and Technology Section of the American Bar Association, New York, Longman, 1986, pp 335-341.

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<sup>55</sup> Gareth Locksley, 'Information Technology and Capitalist Development', *Capital and Class*, 27, Winter, 1986, p 89.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, p 91.

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'library' systems to a closed system of private ownership.<sup>57</sup> The second feature, however, is the application of the principle of indefinite repetition that emerges from the technologies of mass production to the technologies of production and reproduction of information.

The copyright is one of the central mechanisms used by both capitalist and state capitalist systems to try to reconcile the contradiction between these two principles. It is a drive to signature which seeks to limit repetition – that is, to limit the potentially infinite iterability of writing and of all its technological extensions. But this is doubly impossible. In the first place, there is the impossibility of enforcing an artificial scarcity imposed on a technology of proliferation. In the second place, there is the practical and philosophical impossibility of separating ideas from expressions in such a way that private ownership would be extended only to the latter without touching the expressed ideas. Copyright doctrine relating to computer software dramatises the contradictions involved in the attempt to privatise information, and indeed it demonstrates the impossibility of any coherent doctrine of private property in intellectual productions.



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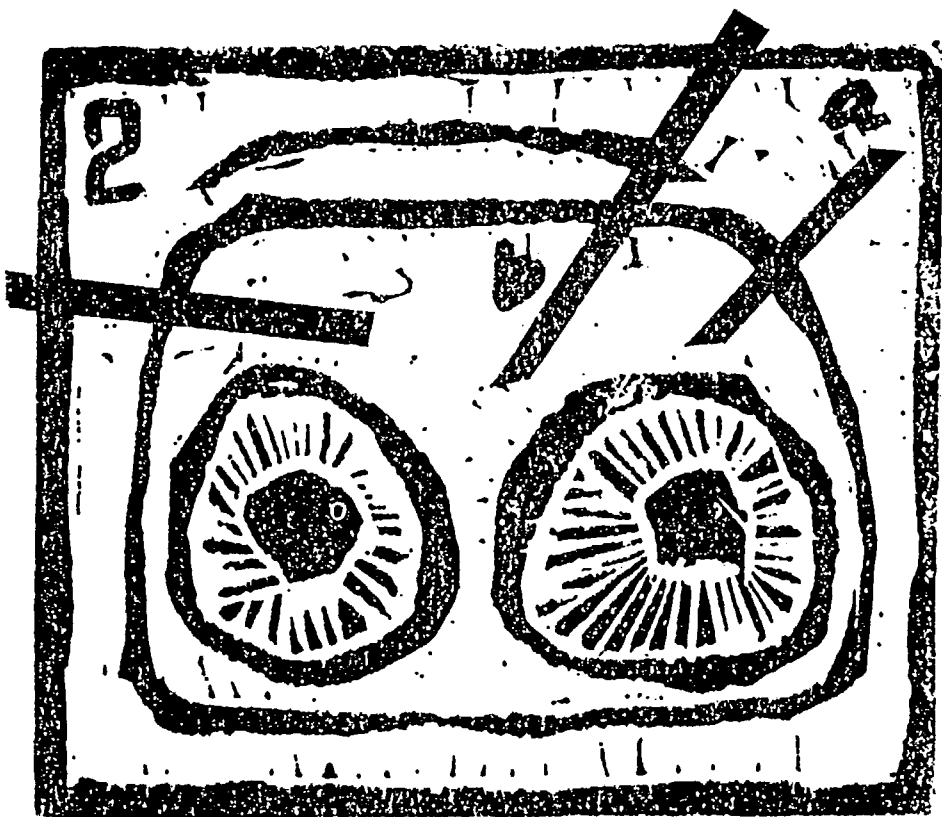
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# THE WORK OF CULTURE IN THE AGE OF CYBERNETIC SYSTEMS

BY BILL NICHOLS

THE COMPUTER IS more than an object; it is also an icon and a metaphor that suggests new ways of thinking about ourselves and our environment, new ways of constructing images of what it means to be human and to live in a humanoid world. Cybernetic systems include an entire array of machines and apparatuses that exhibit computational power. Such systems contain a dynamic, even if limited, quotient of intelligence. Telephone networks, communication satellites, radar systems, programmable laser videodiscs, robots, biogenetically engineered cells, rocket guidance systems, videotex networks – all exhibit a capacity to process information and execute actions. They are all ‘cybernetic’ in that they are self-regulating mechanisms or systems within predefined limits and in relation to predefined tasks. Just as the camera has come to symbolise the entirety of the photographic and cinematic processes, the computer has come to symbolise the entire spectrum of networks, systems and devices that exemplify cybernetic or ‘automated but intelligent’ behaviour.

This article traverses a field of inquiry which Walter Benjamin has crossed before me, most notably in his 1936 essay, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’. My intention, in fact, is to carry Benjamin’s inquiry forward and to ask how cybernetic systems, symbolised by the computer, represent a set of transformations in our conception of and relation to self and reality of a magnitude commensurate with the transformations in the conception of and relation to self and reality wrought by mechanical reproduction and symbolised by the camera. This intention necessarily encounters the dilemma of a profound ambivalence directed toward that which constitutes our imaginary Other, in this case not a mothering parent but those systems of artificial intelligence I have set out to examine here. Such ambivalence certainly permeates Benjamin’s essay and is, at best, dialectical, at worst, simply contradictory. Put more positively, those systems against which we test and measure the boundaries of our own identity require subjection to a double hermeneutic of suspicion and revelation in which we must acknowledge the negative, currently dominant tendency toward control, and the positive, more latent potential toward collectivity.<sup>1</sup> It will be in terms of law that the dominance of control over collectivity can be most vividly analysed.

In summary, what I want to do is recall a few of the salient points in

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of the double hermeneutic derives from Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981, especially the final chapter.

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Benjamin's original essay, contrast characteristics of cybernetic systems with those of mechanical reproduction, establish a central metaphor with which to understand these cybernetic systems, and then ask how this metaphor acquires the force of the real; how different institutions legitimate their practices, recalibrate their rationale, and modulate their image in light of this metaphor. In particular, I want to ask how the preoccupations of a cybernetic imagination have gained institutional legitimacy in areas such as the law. In this case, like others, a tension can be seen to exist between the liberating potential of the cybernetic imagination and the ideological tendency to preserve the existing form of social relations. I will focus on the *work* of culture – its processes, operations and procedures – and I will assume that culture is of the essence: I include within it texts and practices, art and actions that give concrete embodiment to the relation we have to existing conditions to a dominant mode of production, and the various relations of production it sustains. Language, discourse and messages are central. Their style and rhetoric basic. Around each 'fact' and every 'datum', all realities and evidence, everything 'out there', a persuasive, affective tissue of discourse accrues. It is in and through this signifying tissue, arranged in discursive formations and institutional arenas, that struggle takes place and semiosis occurs.

### Mechanical Reproduction and Film Culture

Benjamin argues for correspondences among three types of changes: in the economic mode of production, in the nature of art and in categories of perception. At the base of industrial society lies the assembly line and mass production. Technological innovation allows these processes to extend into the domain of art, separating off from its traditional ritual (or 'cult') value a new and distinct market (or 'exhibition') value. The transformation also strips art of its 'aura' by which Benjamin means its authenticity, its attachment to the domain of tradition:

*The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.*<sup>2</sup>

The aura of an object compels attention. Whether a work of art or natural landscape, we confront it in one place and only one place. We discover its use value in the exercise of ritual, in that place, with that object, or in the contemplation of the object for its uniqueness. The object in possession of aura, natural or historical, inanimate or human, engages us as if it had 'the power to look back in return'.<sup>3</sup>

One thing mechanical reproduction cannot, by definition, reproduce is authenticity. This is at the heart of the change it effects in the work of art. 'Mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual' (p 224). The former basis in ritual

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, p 221. (Further page references from this essay will be given in the text.)

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Schriften*, 2 vols, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955, I, p 461. Translated in Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, p 77.

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yields to a new basis for art in politics, particularly, for Benjamin, the politics of the masses and mass movements, where fascism represents an ever-present danger. The possibilities for thoroughgoing emancipation are held in check by the economic system surrounding the means of mechanical reproduction, especially in film where 'illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations' (p 232) deflect us from the camera's ability to introduce us to 'unconscious optics' that reveal those forms of interaction our eyes neglect:

*The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. (p 237)*

Objects without aura substitute mystique. In a remarkably prescient passage, relegated to a footnote, Benjamin elaborates on how political practice opens the way for a strange transformation of the actor when democracies encounter the crisis of fascism. Mechanical reproduction allows the actor an unlimited public rather than the delimited one of the stage or, for the politician, Parliament. 'Though their tasks may be different, the change affects equally the actor and the ruler. . . . This results in a new selection, a selection before the equipment (of mechanical reproduction) from which the star and the dictator emerge victoriously' (p 247).

Alterations like the replacement of aura with mystique coincide with the third major change posited by Benjamin, change in categories of perception. The question of whether film or photography is an art is here secondary to the question of whether art itself has not been radically transformed in form and function. A radical change in the nature of art implies that our very ways of seeing the world have also changed: 'During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence' (p 222).

Mechanical reproduction makes *copies* of visible objects, like paintings, mountain ranges, even human beings, which until then had been thought of as unique and irreplaceable. It brings the upheavals of the industrial revolution to a culmination. The ubiquitous copy also serves as an externalised manifestation of the work of industrial capitalism itself. It paves the way for seeing, and recognising, the nature and extent of the very changes mechanical reproduction itself produces.

What element of film most strongly testifies to this new form of machine-age perception? For Benjamin it is that element which best achieves what Dadaism had aspired to: 'changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator'. Film achieves these changes through montage, or editing. Montage rips things from their original place in an assigned sequence and reassembles them in ever changing combinations that make the contemplation invited by a painting impossible. Montage multiplies the potential of collage to couple two realities

on a single plane that apparently does not suit them into the juxtaposition of an infinite series of realities. As Georges Bataille proclaimed, 'Transgression does not negate an interdiction, it transcends and completes it.' In this spirit, montage transcends and completes the project of the Dadaists in their conscious determination to strip aura from the work of art and of the early French ethnographers who delighted in the strange juxtapositions of artifacts from different cultures.

Montage has a liberating potential, prying art away from ritual and toward the arena of political engagement. Montage gives back to the worker a view of the world as malleable. Benjamin writes,

*Man's need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the changes threatening him. The film corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus – changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic, on a historical scale by every present-day citizen. (p 250)*

*By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling. (p 236)*

Mechanical reproduction involves the appropriation of an original, although with film even the notion of an original fades: that which is filmed has been organised in order to be filmed. This process of appropriation engenders a vocabulary: the 'take' or 'camera shot' used to 'shoot' a scene where both stopping a take and editing are called a 'cut'. The violent re-ordering of the physical world and its meanings provides the shock effects Benjamin finds necessary if we are to come to terms with the age of mechanical reproduction. The explosive, violent potential described by Benjamin and celebrated by Brecht is what the dominant cinema must muffle, defuse and contain. And what explosive potential can be located in the computer and its cybernetic systems for the elimination of drudgery and toil, for the promotion of collectivity and affinity, for interconnectedness, systemic networking and shared decision-making, this, too, must be defused and contained by the industries of information which localise, condense and consolidate this potential democratisation of power into hierarchies of control.

'Montage – the connecting of dissimilars to shock an audience into insight – becomes for Benjamin a major principle to artistic production in a technological age.'<sup>4</sup> Developing new ways of seeing to the point where they become habitual is not ideological for Benjamin but transformative. They are not the habits of old ways but new; they are skills

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<sup>4</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p 63.

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<sup>5</sup> This quote is from James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol 23 no 4, October 1981, pp 559-564, where he offers an excellent description of the confluences between surrealism and certain tendencies within early ethnography in 1920s France.

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which are difficult to acquire precisely because they are in opposition to ideology. The tasks before us 'at the turning points of history' cannot be met by contemplation. 'They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation' (p 240). The shocks needed in order to adjust to threatening changes may be co-opted by the spectacles a culture industry provides. For Benjamin the only recourse is to those skills he himself adopted: the new habits of a sensibility trained to disassemble and reconstruct reality, of a writing style intended to relieve idlers of their convictions, of a working class trained not only to produce and reproduce the existing relations of production but to reproduce those very relations in a new, liberating form. 'To see culture and its norms – beauty, truth, reality – as artificial arrangements, susceptible to detached analysis and comparison with other possible dispositions' becomes the vantage point not only of the surrealist but the revolutionary.<sup>5</sup>

The process of adopting new ways of seeing that consequently propose new forms of social organisation becomes a paradoxical, or dialectical, process when the transformations that spawn new habits, new vision, are themselves engendered and substantially recuperated by the existing form of social organisation which they contain the potential to overcome. But the process goes forward all the same. It does so less in terms of a culture of mechanical reproduction, which has reached a point similar to that of a tradition rooted in Benjamin's time, than in terms of a culture of electronic dissemination and computation.

We might then ask in what ways is our 'sense of reality' being adjusted by new means of electronic computation and digital communication? Do these technological changes introduce new forms of culture into the relations of production at the same time as the 'shock of the new' helps emancipate us from the acceptance of social relations and cultural forms as natural, obvious or timeless? The distinction between an industrial capitalism, even in its 'late' phase of monopoly concentration, and an information society that does not 'produce' so much as 'process' its basic forms of economic resource has become an increasingly familiar distinction for us. Have cybernetic systems brought about changes in our perception of the world that hold liberating potential? Is it conceivable, for example, that contemporary transformations in the economic structure of capitalism, attended by technological change, institute a less individuated, more communal form of perception similar to that which was attendant upon face-to-face ritual and aura but which is now mediated by anonymous circuitry and the simulation of direct encounter? Does montage now have its equivalent in interactive simulations and simulated interactions experienced according to predefined constraints? Does the work of art in the age of postmodernism lead, at least potentially, to apperceptions of the 'deep structure' of post-industrial society comparable to the apperceptive discoveries occasioned by mechanical reproduction in the age of industrial capitalism?

We can put Benjamin's arguments, summarised cursorily here, in another perspective by highlighting some of the characteristics associated with early, entrepreneurial capitalism, monopoly capitalism and multinational or post-industrial capitalism:

<b>ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPITALISM</b>	<b>MONOPOLY CAPITALISM</b>	<b>MULTINATIONAL CAPITALISM</b>
steam and locomotive power	electricity and petro-chemical power	microelectronics and nuclear energy
property rights	corporate rights	copyright and patents
nature as Other/conquest of nature	aliens as Other/conquest of Third World	knowledge as Other/conquest of intelligence
nationalism	imperialism	multinationalism
working class vanguard	consumer group vanguard	affinity group vanguard
Tuberculosis - contamination by nature	Cancer - contamination by an aberrant self	AIDS - deficiency of self (collapse of immune system that distinguishes self from environment)
- isolation of self from threatening environment - vulnerability to invasive agents - heightened individuation	- isolation of aberrant tissue from self - vulnerability to self-consumption - heightened schizophrenia	- isolation of self by artificial life support - vulnerability to systemic collapse - heightened sense of paranoia
realism	modernism	postmodernism
film mechanical reproduction	television instantaneous broadcast	computer logico-iconic simulations
reproducible instances	ubiquitous occurrences	processes of absorption and feedback
the copy	the event	the chip (and VDT display)
subtext of possession	subtext of mediation	subtext of control
image and representation	collage and juxtaposition	simulacra

Simulacra introduce the key question of how the control of information moves toward control of sensory experience, interpretation, intelligence and knowledge. The power of the simulation moves to the

heart of the cybernetic matter. It posits the simulation as an imaginary Other which serves as the measure of our own identity and, in doing so, prompts the same form of intense ambivalence that the mothering parent once did: a guarantee of identity based on what can never be made part of oneself. In early capitalism the human was defined in relation to an animal world that evoked fascination and attraction, repulsion and resentment. The human animal was similar to but different from all other animals. In monopoly capitalism the human was defined in relation to a machine world that evoked its own distinctive blend of ambivalences. The human machine was similar to but different from all other machines. In post-industrial capitalism the human is defined in relation to cybernetic systems – computers, bio-genetically engineered organisms, eco-systems, expert systems, robots, androids and cyborgs – all of which evoke those forms of ambivalence reserved for the Other that is the measure of ourselves. The human cyborg is similar to but different from all other cyborgs. Through these transformations questions of difference persist. Human identity remains at stake, subject to change, vulnerable to challenge and modification as the very metaphors prompted by the imaginary Others that give it form themselves change. The metaphor that's meant (that's taken as real) becomes the simulation. The simulation displaces any antecedent reality, any aura, any referent to history. Frames collapse. What had been fixed comes unhinged. New identities, ambivalently adopted, prevail.

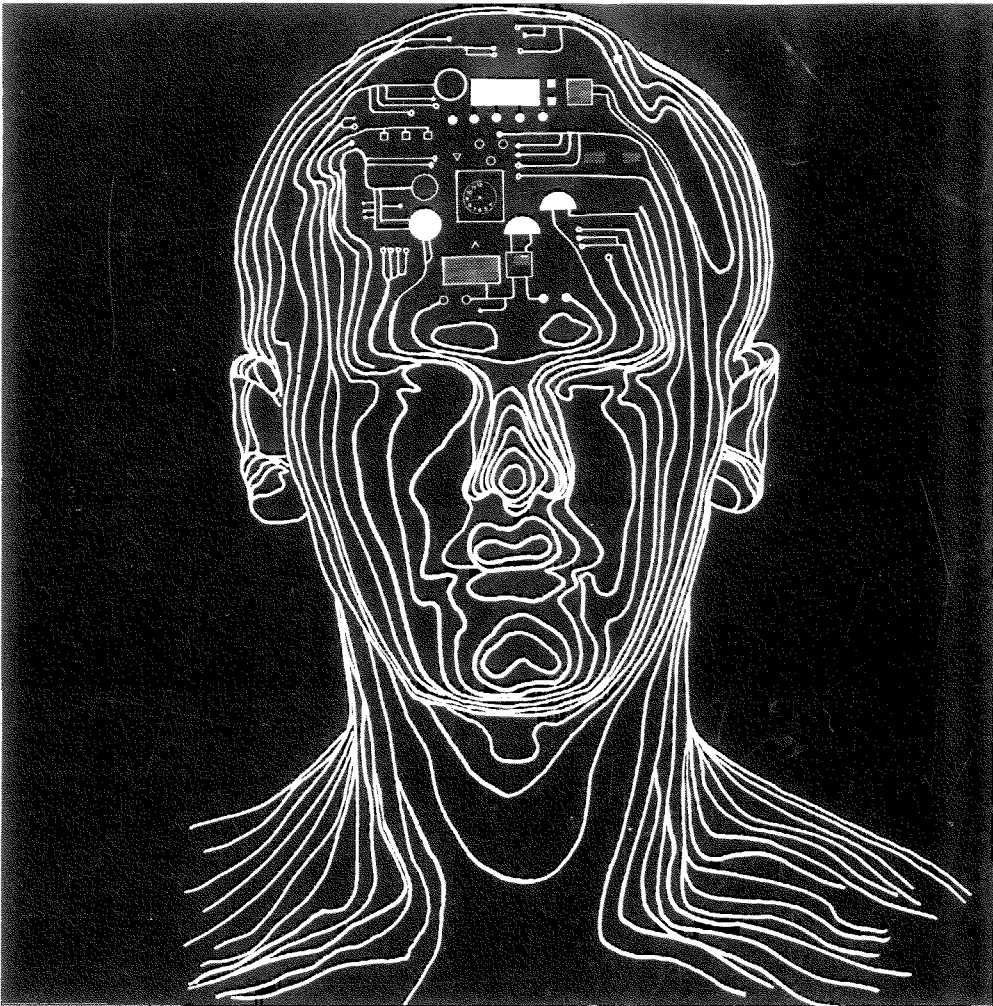
The very concept of a text, whether unique or one of myriad copies, for example, underpins almost all discussion of cultural forms including film, photography, and their analogue in an age of electronic communication, television (where the idea of 'flow' becomes an important amendment). But in cybernetic systems, the concept of 'text' itself undergoes substantial slippage. Although a textual element can still be isolated, computer-based systems are primarily interactive rather than one-way, open-ended rather than fixed. Dialogue, regulated and disseminated by digital computation, deemphasises authorship in favour of 'messages-in-circuit'<sup>6</sup> that take fixed but effervescent, continually variable form. The link between message and substrate is loosened: words on a printed page are irradicable; text on a VDT (video display terminal) is readily altered. The text conveys the sense of being addressed to us. The message-in-circuit is both addressed to and addressable by us; the mode is fundamentally interactive, or dialogic. That which is most textual in nature – the fixed, read-only-memory (ROM) and software programs – no longer addresses us. Such texts are machine addressable. They direct those operational procedures that ultimately give the impression that the computer responds personally to us, simulating the processes of conversation or of interaction with another intelligence to effect a desired outcome. Like face-to-face encounter, cybernetic systems offer (and demand) almost immediate response. This is a major part of their hazard in the workplace and their fascination outside it. The temporal flow and once-only quality of face-to-face encounter

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the essays in Part III, 'Form and Pathology in Relationship' of Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, New York, Ballantine, 1972, where this phrase is introduced and applied to various situations.

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Cyborg: the human brain as circuit board. (Illustration courtesy of *Program* magazine.)

becomes embedded within a system ready to restore, alter, modify or transform any given moment to us at any time. Cybernetic interactions can become intensely demanding, more so than we might imagine from our experience with texts, even powerfully engaging ones. Reactions must be almost instantaneous, grooved into eye and finger reflexes until they are automatic. This is the bane of the 'automated workplace' and the joy of the video game. Experienced video game players describe their play as an interactive ritual that becomes totally self-absorbing. As David, a lawyer in his mid-30s interviewed by Sherry Turkle, puts it,

*... At the risk of sounding, uh, ridiculous, if you will, it's almost a Zen type of thing. ... When I can direct myself totally but not feel directed at all.*

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computer and the Human Spirit*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1984, p 86.

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<sup>8</sup> Steven J Heims, *John von Neuman and Norbert Wiener: From Mathematics to the Technologies of Life and Death*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1980, describes how research on anti-aircraft guidance systems led Julian Bigelow and Norbert Wiener to develop a mathematical theory 'for predicting the future as best one can on the basis of incomplete information about the past' (p 183). For an overview of the history of cybernetic theory and cognitive psychology in the context of its military-industrial origins, see Paul N Edwards, 'Formalized Warfare', unpublished ms (1984), History of Consciousness Program, University of California, Santa Cruz.

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'The Implosion of Meaning in the Media and the Implosion of the Social in the Masses', in Kathleen Woodward (ed), *The Myths of Information*, Madison, Coda Press, 1980, p 139.

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*You're totally absorbed and it's all happening there. . . . You either get through this little maze so that the creature doesn't swallow you up or you don't. And if you can focus your attention on that, and if you can really learn what you're supposed to do, then you really are in relationship with the game.*<sup>7</sup>

The enhanced ability to test the environment, which Benjamin celebrated in film ('The camera director in the studio occupies a place identical with that of the examiner during aptitude tests,' p 246) certainly continues with cybernetic communication.<sup>8</sup> The computer's dialogic mode carries the art of the 'what if' even further than the camera eye has done, extending beyond the 'what if I could see more than the human eye can see' to 'what if I can render palpable those possible transformations of existing states that the individual mind can scarcely contemplate?'

If mechanical reproduction centres on the question of reproducibility and renders authenticity and the original problematic, cybernetic simulation renders experience, and the real itself, problematic. Instead of reproducing, and altering, our relation to an original work, cybernetic communication simulates, and alters, our relation to our environment and mind. As Jean Baudrillard argues, 'Instead of facilitating communication, it (information, the message-in-circuit) exhausts itself in the *staging* of communication . . . this is the gigantic simulation process with which we are familiar.'<sup>9</sup> Instead of a representation of social practices recoded into the conventions and signs of another language or sign-system, like the cinema, we encounter simulacra that represent a new form of social practice in their own right and re-present nothing. The photographic image, as Roland Barthes proposed, suggests 'having been there' of what it represents, of what is present-in-absentia. The computer simulation suggests only a 'being here' and 'having come from nowhere' of what it presents, drawing on those genetic-like algorithms that allow it to bring its simulation into existence, *sui generis*. Among other things, computer systems simulate the dialogical and other qualities of life itself. The individual becomes nothing but an ahistorical position within a chain of discourse marked exhaustively by those shifters that place him or her within speech acts ('I', 'here', 'now', 'you', 'there', 'then'). In face-to-face encounter this 'I' all speakers share can be inflected to represent some part of the self not caught by words. To respond to the query, 'How are you?' by saying 'Not *too* bad', rather than 'Fine' suggests something about a particular state of mind or style of expression and opens onto the domains of feeling and empathy. What cannot be represented in language directly (the bodily, living 'me' that writes or utters words) can significantly inflect speech, and dialogue, despite its enforced exclusion from any literal representation.

In cybernetic systems, though, 'I' and 'you' are strictly relational propositions attached to no substantive body, no living individuality. In place of human intersubjectivity we discover a systems interface, a

boundary between cyborgs that selectively passes information but without introducing questions of consciousness or the unconscious, desire or will, empathy or conscience, saved in simulated forms.

Even exceptions like ELIZA, a program designed to simulate a therapeutic encounter, prove the rule. 'I' and 'you' function as partners in therapy only as long as the predefined boundaries are observed. As Sherry Turkle notes, if you introduce the word 'mother' into your exchange, and then say, 'Let's discuss paths toward nuclear disarmament,' ELIZA might well offer the nonsense reply, 'Why are you telling me that your mother makes paths toward nuclear disarmament?'<sup>10</sup> Simulations like these may bring with them the shock of recognising the reification of a fundamental social process, but they also position us squarely within a realm of communication and exchange cleanly evacuated of the intersubjective complexities of direct encounter. Cybernetic systems give form, external expression, to processes of mind (through messages-in-circuit) such that the very ground of social cohesion and consciousness becomes mediated through a computational apparatus. Cybernetic interaction achieves with an other (an intelligent apparatus) the simulation of social process itself.

Cybernetic dialogue may offer freedom from many of the apparent risks inherent in direct encounter; it offers the illusion of control. This use of intelligence provides a lure that seems to be much more attractive to men than women. At first there may seem to be a gain, particularly regarding the question of the look or gaze. Looking is an intensely charged act, one significantly neglected by Benjamin, but stressed in recent feminist critiques of dominant Hollywood cinema. There looking is posed as a primarily masculine act and 'to-be-looked-at-ness' a feminine state, reinforced, in the cinema, by the camera's own voyeuristic gaze, editing patterns that prompt identification with masculine activism and feminine passivity, and a star system that institutionalises these uses of the look through an iconography of the physical body.<sup>11</sup> This entire issue becomes circumvented in cybernetic systems that simulate dialogic interaction, or face-to-face encounter, but exclude not only the physical self or its visual representation but also the cinematic apparatus that may place the representation of sexual difference within a male-dominant hierarchy.

Correct in so far as it goes, the case for the circumvention of the sexist coding of the gaze overlooks another form of hierarchical sexual coding that revolves around the question of whether a fascination with cybernetic systems is not itself a gender-related (i.e., a primarily masculine) phenomenon (excluding from consideration an even more obvious gender coding that gives almost all video games, for example, a strong aura of aggressive, militaristic activity). The questions that we pose about the sexist nature of the gaze within the cinematic text and the implications this has for the position we occupy in relation to such texts, may not be wholly excluded so much as displaced. A (predominantly masculine) fascination with the *control* of simulated interactions

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<sup>10</sup> Sherry Turkle, *op cit*, p 264.

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<sup>11</sup> See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

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replaces a (predominantly masculine) fascination with the to-be-looked-at-ness of a projected image. Simulated intersubjectivity as a product of automated but intelligent systems invokes its own peculiar psychodynamic. Mechanical reproduction issues an invitation to the fetishist: a special relationship to the images of actors or politicians in place of any more direct association. The fetish *object* – the image of the other that takes the place of the other – becomes the centre of attention while fetishistic viewers look on from their anonymous and voyeuristic, seeing-but-unseen sanctuary in the audience. But the output of computational systems stresses simulation, interaction and process itself. Engagement with this *process* becomes the object of fetishisation rather than representations whose own status as produced objects has been masked. Cybernetic interaction emphasises the *fetishist* rather than the fetish object: instead of a taxonomy of stars we find a galaxy of computer freaks. The consequence of systems without aura, systems that replace direct encounter and realise otherwise inconceivable projections and possibilities, is a fetishism of such systems and processes of control themselves. Fascination resides in the subordination of human volition to the operating constraints of the larger system. We can talk to a system whose responsiveness grants us an awesome feeling of power and control. But as Paul Edwards observes, 'Though individuals . . . certainly make decisions and set goals, as links in the chain of command they are allowed no choices regarding the ultimate purposes and values of the system. Their "choices" are . . . always the permutations and combinations of a predefined set.'<sup>12</sup>

The desire to exercise a sense of control over a complex but predefined logical universe replaces the desire to view the image of an Other over which the viewer can imagine himself to have a measure of control. The explosive power of the dynamite of the tenth of a second extolled by Benjamin is contained within the channels of a psychopathology that leave exempt from apperception, or control, the mechanisms that place ultimate control on the side of the cinematic apparatus or cybernetic system. These mechanisms – the relay of gazes between camera, characters and viewer, the absorption into a simulacrum with complex problems and eloquent solutions – are the ground upon which engagement occurs and are not addressable within the constraints of the system itself. It is here, at this point, that dynamite must be applied.

This is even more difficult with computers and cybernetics than with cameras and the cinema. Benjamin himself noted how strenuous a task it is in film to mask the means of production, to keep the camera and its supporting paraphernalia and crew from intruding upon the fiction. Exposure of this other scene, the one behind the camera, is a constant hazard and carries the risk of shattering the suspension of disbelief. Only those alignments between camera and spectator that preserve the illusion of a fictional world without cameras, lights, directors, studio sets and so on are acceptable. Benjamin comments, perhaps with more of a surrealist's delight in strange juxtapositions than a marxist's, 'The

equipment-free aspect of reality here (in films) has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology' (p 233).

Within the contemporary prison-house of language, in Fredric Jameson's apt phrase, the orchid of immediate reality, like the mechanical bird seen at the end of *Blue Velvet*, appears to have been placed permanently under glass, but for Benjamin neither the process by which an illusionistic world is produced nor the narrative strategies associated with it receive extended consideration. For him, the reminders of the productive process were readily apparent, not least through the strenuous efforts needed to mask them. The 'other scene' where fantasies and fictions actually become conceptually and mechanically produced may be repressed but it is not obliterated. If not immediately visible, it lurks just out of sight in the off-screen space where the extension of a fictional world somewhere collides with the world of the camera apparatus in one dimension and the world of the viewer in another. It retains the potential to intrude at every 'cut' or edit; it threatens to reveal itself in every lurch of implausibility or sleight-of-hand with which a narrative attempts to achieve the sense of an ending.

With cybernetic systems, this other scene from which complex rule-governed universes actually get produced recedes further from sight. The governing procedures no longer address us in order to elicit a suspension of disbelief; they address the cybernetic system, the micro-processor of the computer, in order to absorb us into their operation. The other scene has vanished into logic circuits and memory chips, into 'machine language' and interface cards. The chip replaces the copy. Just as the mechanical reproduction of copies revealed the power of industrial capitalism to reorganise and reassemble the world around us, rendering it as commodity art, the automated intelligence of chips reveals the power of post-industrial capitalism to simulate and replace the world around us, rendering not only that exterior realm but also interior ones of consciousness, intelligence, thought and intersubjectivity as commodity experience.

The chip is pure surface, pure simulation of thought. Its material surface *is* its meaning – without history, without depth, without aura, affect or feeling. The copy reproduces the world, the chip simulates it. It is the difference between being able to remake the world and being able to efface it. The micro-electronic chip draws us into a realm, a design for living, that fosters a fetishised relationship with the simulation as a new reality all its own based on the capacity to control, within the domain of the simulation, what had once eluded control beyond it. The orchids of immediate reality that Benjamin was wont to admire have become the paper flowers of the cybernetic simulation.

Electronic simulation instead of mechanical reproduction. Fetishistic addiction to a process of logical simulation rather than a fascination with a fetishised object of desire. Desire for the dialogic or interactive and the illusion of control versus desire for the fixed but unattainable and the il-

lusion of possession. Narrative and realism draw us into relations of identification with the actions and qualities of characters. Emulation is possible, as well as self-enhancement. Aesthetic pleasure allows for a revision of the world from which a work of art arises. Reinforcing what is or proposing what might be, the work of art remains susceptible to a double hermeneutic of suspicion and revelation. Mechanical reproduction changes the terms decidedly, but the metonymic or indexical relationship between representational art and the social world to which it refers remains a fundamental consideration.

By contrast, cybernetic simulations offer the possibility of completely replacing any direct connection with the experiential realm beyond their bounds. Like the cinema, this project, too, has its origins in the expansion of nineteenth century industrialism. The emblematic precursors of the cyborg – the machine as self-regulating system – were those animate, self-regulating systems that offered a source of enchantment even museums could not equal: the zoo and the botanical garden.

At the opening of the first large-scale fair or exhibition, the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria spoke of 'the greatest day in our history (when) the whole world of nature and art was collected at the call of the queen of cities'. Those permanent exhibitions – the zoo and botanical garden – introduced a new form of vicarious experience quite distinct from the aesthetic experience of original art or mechanically reproduced copies. The zoo brings back alive evidence of a world we could not otherwise know, now under apparent control. It offers experience at a remove that is fundamentally different as a result of having been uprooted from its original context. The indifferent, unthreatened and unthreatening gaze of captive animals provides eloquent testimony to the difference between the zoo and the natural habitat to which it refers. The difference in the significance of what appears to be the same thing, the gaze, indicates that the change in context has introduced a new system of meanings, a new discourse or language.

Instead of the shocks of montage that offer a 'true means of exercise' appropriate to the 'profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus' under industrial capitalism, the zoo and botanical garden exhibit a predefined, self-regulating world with no reality outside of its own boundaries. These worlds may then become the limit of our understanding of those worlds to which they refer but of which we seldom have direct knowledge. 'Wildlife' or 'the African savannah' is its simulation inside the zoo or garden or diorama. Absorption with these simulacra and the sense of control they afford may be an alternative means of exercise appropriate to the apperceptive changes required by a service and information economy.

Computer-based systems extend the possibilities inherent in the zoo and garden much further. The ideal simulation would be a perfect replica, now *controlled* by whoever controls the algorithms of simulation – a state imaginatively rendered in films like *The Stepford Wives* or *Bladerunner* and apparently already achieved in relation to cer-

tain biogenetically engineered micro-organisms. Who designs and controls these greater systems and for what purpose becomes a question of central importance.

### The Cybernetic Metaphor: Transformations of Self and Reality

The problems of tracking anti-aircraft weapons against extremely fast targets prompted the research and development of intelligent mechanisms capable of predicting future states or positions far faster than the human brain could do. The main priorities were speed, efficiency and reliability, i.e., fast-acting, error-free systems. ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer), the first high-powered digital computer, was designed to address precisely this problem by performing ballistic computations at enormous speed and allowing the outcome to be translated into adjustments in the firing trajectory of anti-aircraft guns.

The men (sic) who assembled to solve problems of this order and who formalised their approach into the research paradigms of information theory and cognitive psychology through the Macy Foundation Conferences, represent a who's who of cybernetics: John von Neuman, Oswald Weblen, Vannevar Bush, Norbert Wiener, Warren McCulloch, Gregory Bateson and Claude Shannon, among others.<sup>13</sup> Such research ushers in the central metaphors of the cybernetic imagination: not only the human as an automated but intelligent system, but also automated, intelligent systems as human, not only the simulation of reality but the reality of the simulation. These metaphors take form around the question, the still unanswered question, put by John Stroud at the Sixth Macy Conference:

*We know as much as possible about how the associated gear bringing the information to the tracker [of an anti-aircraft gun] operates and how all the gear from the tracker to the gun operates. So we have the human operator surrounded on both sides by very precisely known mechanisms and the question comes up, 'What kind of machine have we placed in the middle?'*<sup>14</sup>

This question of 'the machine in the middle' and the simulation as reality dovetails with Jean Baudrillard's recent suggestion that the staging powers of simulation establish a hyperreality we only half accept but seldom refute, 'Hyperreality of communication of meaning: by dint of being more real than the real itself, reality is destroyed.'<sup>15</sup>

Such metaphors, then, become more than a discovery of similarity, they ultimately propose an identity. Norbert Wiener's term 'cyborg' (cybernetic organism) encapsulates the new identity which, instead of seeing humans reduced to automata, sees simulacra which encompass the human elevated to the organic. Consequently, the human cognitive apparatus (itself a hypothetical construct patterned after the cybernetic

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Paul N Edwards, *ibid.*, for a more detailed account of this synergism between the development of cybernetics and military needs. For a cybernetic theory of alcoholism and schizophrenia, see Gregory Bateson, *op cit*, and Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson's study of human interaction in a systems framework in *Pragmatics of Human Communication*.

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<sup>14</sup> John Stroud 'Psychological Moments in Perception - Discussions', in H Van Foersta, et al (eds), *Cybernetics: Circular Causal and Feedback Mechanisms in Biological and Social Systems*, Transactions of the Sixth Macy Conference, New York, Josiah Macy Foundation, 1949, pp 27-28.

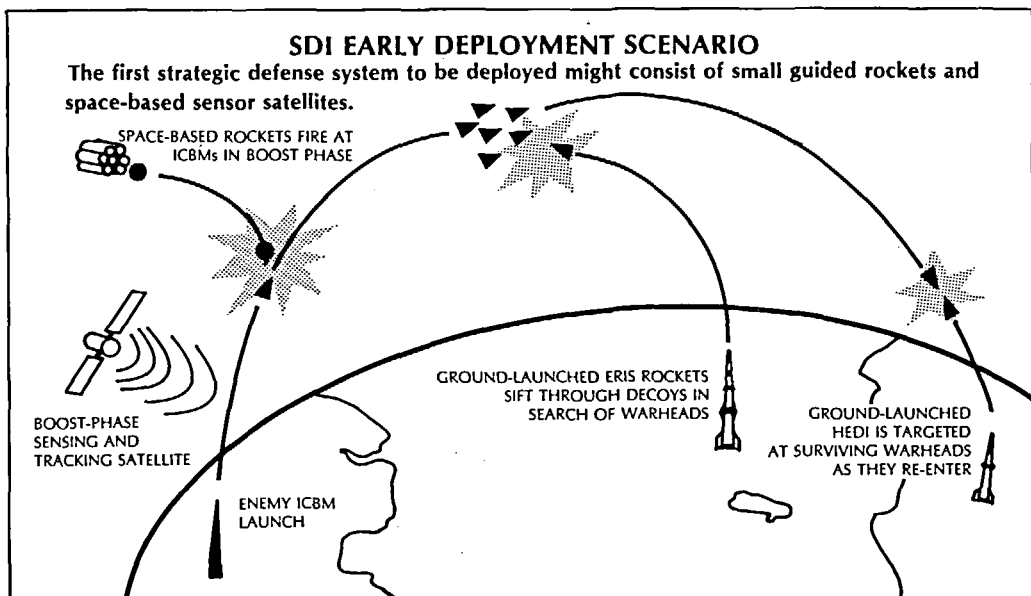
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<sup>15</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *op cit*, p 139.

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model of automated intelligence) is expected to negotiate the world by means of simulation.

Our cognitive apparatus treats the real as though it consisted of those properties exhibited by simulacra. The real becomes simulation. Simulacra, in turn, serve as the mythopoetic impetus for that sense of the real we posit beyond the simulation. A sobering example of what is at stake follows from the Reaganomic conceptualisation of war. The Strategic Defense Initiative represents a vast Battle of the Cyborgs video game where players compete to save the world from nuclear holocaust. Reagan's simulated warfare will turn the electromagnetic force fields of '50s science-fiction films that shielded monsters and creatures from the arsenal of human destructive power into ploughshares beyond the ozone. Star Wars will be the safe sex version of international conflict: not one drop of our enemy's perilous bodily fluids, none of their nuclear ejaculations, will come into contact with the free world.



Reagan's simulation of war as a replacement for the reality of war does not depend entirely on the SDI. We have already seen it at work in the invasion of Grenada and the raid on Libya. Each time, we have had the evocation of the reality of war: the iconography of heroic fighters, embattled leaders, brave decisions, powerful technology and concerted effort rolled into the image of military victory, an image of quick, decisive action that defines the 'American will'.

These simulacra of war, though, are fought with an imaginary enemy, in the Lacanian sense, and in the commonsense meaning of an enemy



posited within those permutations allowed by a predefined set of assumptions and foreign policy options: a Grenadian or Libyan 'threat' appears on the video screens of America's political leadership. Long experience with the communist menace leads to prompt and sure recognition. Ronny pulls the trigger. These simulations lack the full-blown, catastrophic consequences of real war, but this does not diminish the reality of this particular simulation nor the force with which it is mapped onto a historical 'reality' it simultaneously effaces. Individuals find their lives irreversibly altered, people are wounded, many die. These indelible punctuation marks across the face of the real, however, fall into place according to a discourse empowered to make the metaphoric reality of the simulation a basic fact of existence.

A more complex example of what it means to live not only in the society of the spectacle but also in the society of the simulacrum involves the preservation/simulation of life via artificial life-support systems. In such an environment, the presence of life hinges on the presence of 'vital signs'. Their manifestation serves as testimony to the otherwise inaccessible presence of life itself, even though life in this state stands in relation to the 'immediate reality' of life as the zoo stands in relation to nature. The important issue here is that the power of cybernetic simulations prompts a redefinition of such fundamental terms as life and reality, just as, for Benjamin, mechanical reproduction alters the very conception of art and the standards by which we know it. Casting the issue in terms of whether existence within the limits of an artificial life-support system should be considered 'life' obscures the issue in the same way that asking whether film and photography are 'art' does. In each case a presumption is made about a fixed, or ontologically given nature to life or art, rather than recognising how that very presumption has been radically overturned.

And from preserving life artificially it is a small step to creating life by the same means. There is, for example, the case of Baby M. Surrogate mothering, as a term, already demonstrates the reality of the simulation: the actual mothering agent – the woman who bore the child – becomes a *surrogate*, thought of, not as a mother, but as an incubator or 'rented uterus' as one of the trial's medical 'experts' called Mary Beth Whitehead. The *real* surrogate mother, the woman who will assume the role of mother for a child not borne of her own flesh, becomes the real mother, legally and familiarly. The law upholds the priority of the simulation and the power of those who can control this system of surrogacy – measured by class and gender, for it is clearly upper-class males (Judge Harvey Sorkow and the father, William Stern) who mobilised and sanctioned this particular piece of simulation, largely, it would seem, given the alternative of adoption, to preserve a very real, albeit phantastic preoccupation with a patriarchal blood line.

Here we have the simulation of a nuclear family – a denucleated, artificial simulation – made and sanctioned as real, *bona fide*. The trial evoked the reality of the prototypical bourgeois family: well-educated,

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<sup>16</sup> See Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Class*, London, New Left Books, 1975, pp 211-214.

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socially responsible, emotionally stable and economically solvent, in contrast to the lower middle-class Whitehead household. The trial judgment renders as legal verdict the same moral lesson that Cecil Hepworth's 1905 film, *Rescued by Rover*, presents as artistic theme: the propriety of the dominant class, the menace of an unprincipled, jealous and possessive lower class, the crucial importance of narrative donors like the faithful Rover and of social agents like the patronising Sorkow and the central role of the husband as the patriarch able to preside over the constitution and re-constitution of his family. Now replayed as simulation the morality play takes on a reality of its own. People suffer, wounds are inflicted. Lives are irreversibly altered, or even created. Baby M is a child conceived as a product to be sold to fill a position within the signifying discourse of patriarchy.

The role of the judge in this case was, of course, crucial to its outcome. His centrality signals the importance of the material, discursive struggles being waged within the realm of the law. Nicos Poulantzas<sup>16</sup> argues that the juridico-political is the dominant or articulating region in ideological struggle today. Law establishes and upholds the conceptual frame in which subjects, 'free and equal', with 'rights' and 'duties', engage on a playing field made level by legal recourse and due process. These fundamental concepts of *individuals* with the right to enter into and withdraw from relations and obligations to others underpin, he argues, the work of other ideologically important regions in civil society.

Whether the juridico-political is truly the fulcrum of ideological contestation or not, it is clearly a central area of conflict and one in which some of the basic changes in our conception of the human/computer, reality/simulation metaphors get fought out. Re-conceptualisations of copyright and patent law, brought on by computer chip design, computer software, and biogenetic engineering, give evidence of the process by which a dominant ideology seeks to preserve itself in the face of historical change.

Conceptual metaphors take on tangible embodiment through discursive practices and institutional apparatuses. Such practices give a metaphor historical weight and ideological power. Tangible embodiment has always been a conscious goal of the cybernetic imagination where abstract concepts become embedded in the logic and circuitry of a material substrate deployed to achieve specific forms of result such as a computer, an anti-aircraft tracking system or an assembly line robot. These material objects, endowed with automated but intelligent capacities, enter our culture as, among other things, commodities. As a peculiar category of object these cyborgs require clarification of their legal status. What proprietary rights pertain to them? Can they be copyrighted, patented, protected by trade secrets acts; can they themselves as automated but intelligent entities, claim legal rights that had previously been reserved for humans or other living things on a model akin to that which has been applied to animal research?

The answers to such questions do not fall from the sky. They are the

result of struggle, of a clash of forces, and of the efforts, faltering or eloquent, of those whose task it is to make and adjudicate the law. New categories of objects do not necessarily gain the protection of patent or copyright law. One reason for this is that federal law in the United States (where most of my research on this question took place) and the Constitution both enshrine the right of individuals to private ownership of the means of production while also enjoining against undue forms of monopoly control. The Constitution states, 'The Congress shall have power . . . to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries.' Hence the protection of intellectual property (copyright and trademark registration) or industrial and technological property (patents) carves out a proprietary niche within the broader principle of a 'free flow' of ideas and open access to 'natural' sources of wealth.

The cybernetic organism, of course, confounds the distinction between intellectual and technological property. Both a computer and a biogenetically designed cell 'may be temporarily or permanently programmed to perform many different unrelated tasks'.<sup>17</sup> The cybernetic metaphor, of course, allows us to treat the cell and the computer as sources of the same problem. As the author of one legal article observed, 'A ribosome, like a computer, can carry out any sequence of assembly instructions and can assemble virtually unlimited numbers of different organic compounds, including those essential to life, as well as materials that have not yet been invented.'<sup>18</sup> What legal debates have characterised the struggle for proprietary control of these cyborgs?

Regarding patents, only clearly original, unobvious, practical applications of the 'laws of nature' are eligible for protection, a principle firmly established in the Telephone Cases of 1888 where the Supreme Court drew a sharp distinction between electricity itself as non-patentable since it was a 'force of nature' and the telephone where electricity was found, 'A new, specific condition not found in nature and suited to the transmission of vocal or other sounds'.

Recent cases have carried the issue further, asking whether 'intelligent systems' can be protected by patent and, if so, what specific elements of such a system are eligible for protection. Generally, and perhaps ironically, the US Supreme Court has been more prone to grant protection for the fabrication of new life forms, via recombinant DNA experiments, than for the development of computer software. In *Diamond v Chakrabaty* (1980), the Supreme Court ruled in favour of patent protection for Chakrabaty who had developed a new bacterial form capable of degrading petroleum compounds for projected use in oil-spill clean-ups. In other, earlier cases, the Supreme Court withheld patent protection for computer software. In *Gottschalk v Benson* (1972) and in *Parker v Flook* (1979), the Court held that computer programs were merely algorithms, i.e., simple, step-by-step mathematical procedures, and as such were closer to basic principles or concepts than to

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<sup>17</sup> James J Myrick and James A Sprowl, 'Patent Law for Programmed Computers and Programmed Life Forms', *American Bar Association Journal* no 68, August 1982, p 120.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p 121. Some other relevant articles include: 'Biotechnology: Patent Law Developments in Great Britain and the United States', *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* no 6, Spring 1983, pp 563-590; 'Can a Computer be an Author? Copyright Aspects of Artificial Intelligence', *Communication/Entertainment Law Journal* no 4, Summer 1982, pp 707-747; Peter Aufrechtig, 'Copyright Protection for Computer Programs in Read Only Memory Chips', *Hofstra Law Review* no 11, February 1982, pp 329-370; 'Patents on Algorithms, Discoveries and Scientific Principles', *Idea* no 24, 1983, pp 21-39; S Hewitt, 'Protection of Works Created by Use of Computers', *New Law Journal* no 133, March 11, 1983, pp 235-237; E N Kramsky, 'Video Games: Our Legal System Grapples with a Social Phenomenon', *Journal of the Patent Office Society* no 64, June 1982, pp 335-351.

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original and unobvious applications. These decisions helped prompt recourse to a legislative remedy for an untenable situation (for those with a vested interest in the marketability of computer programs); in 1980 Congress passed the Software Act granting some of the protection the judicial branch had been reluctant to offer but still leaving many issues unsettled. A Semiconductor Chip Protection Act followed in 1984 with a new *sui generis* form of protection for chip masks (the templates from which chips are made). Neither copyright nor patent, this protection applies for ten years (less than copyright) and demands less originality of design than does patent law. In this case, the law itself replicates the 'having come from nowhere' quality of the simulation. *The Minnesota Law Review* 70 (December 1985) is devoted to a symposium on this new form of legal protection for intellectual but also industrial property.

The Software Act began the erosion of a basic distinction between copyright and patent by suggesting that useful objects were eligible for copyright. In judicial cases such as *Diamond v Diehr* (1981), the court held that 'when a claim containing a mathematical formula implements or applies that formula in a structure or process which, when considered as a whole, is performing a function which the patent laws were designed to protect (for example, transforming or reducing an article to a different state of things), then the claim satisfies the requirements of [the copyright law].'

This finding ran against the grain of the long-standing *White-Smith Music Publishing Co v Apollo Co* decision of 1908 where the Supreme Court ruled that a player piano roll was ineligible for the copyright protection accorded to the sheet music it duplicated. The roll was considered part of a machine rather than the expression of an idea. The distinction was formulated according to the code of the visible: a copyrightable text must be visually perceptible to the human eye and must 'give to every person *seeing* it the idea created by the original'<sup>19</sup>.

Copyright had the purpose of providing economic incentive to bring new ideas to the marketplace. Copyright does not protect ideas, processes, procedures, systems or methods, only a specific embodiment of such things. (A book on embroidery could receive copyright but the process of embroidery itself could not.) Similarly, copyright cannot protect useful objects or inventions. If an object has an intrinsically utilitarian function, it cannot receive copyright. Useful objects can be patented, *if* they are original enough, or protected by trade secrets acts. For example, a fabric design could receive copyright as a specific, concrete rendition of form. It would be an 'original work of authorship' fixed in the tangible medium of cloth and the 'author' would have the right to display it as an ornamental or artistic object without fear of imitation. But the same fabric design, once embodied in a dress, can no longer be copyrighted since it is now primarily a utilitarian object. Neither the dress, nor any part of it, can receive copyright. Others would be free to imitate its appearance since the basic goal (according to a somewhat non-

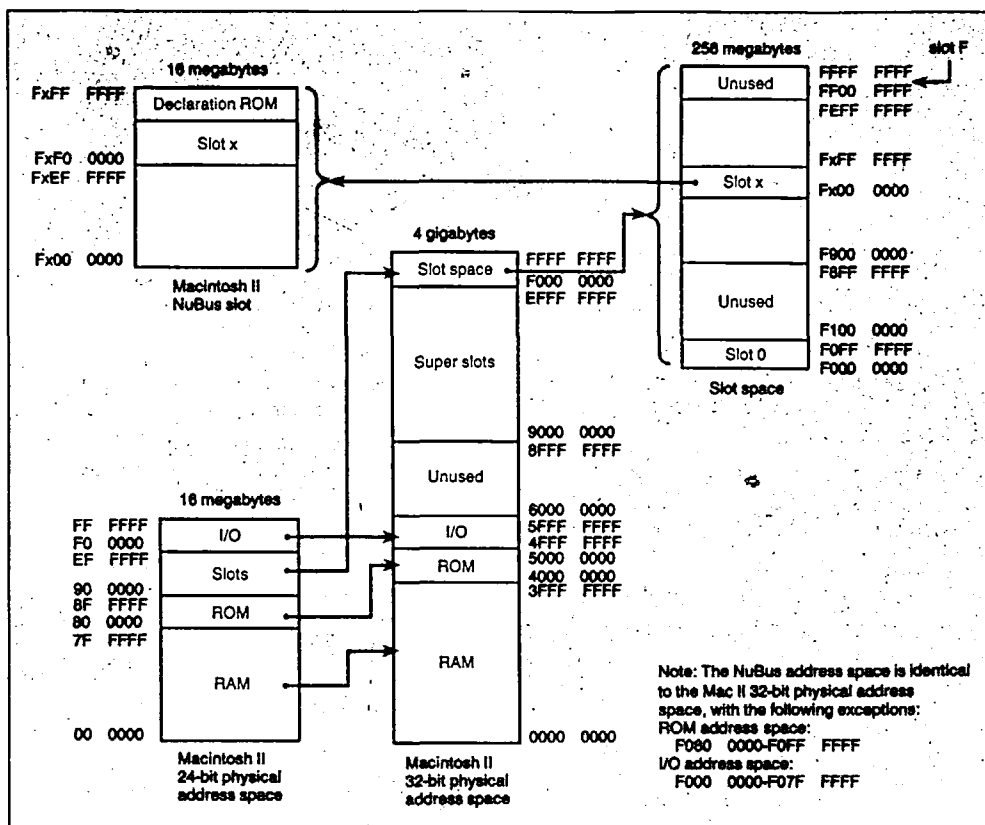
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<sup>19</sup> This case's relevance for computer software litigation is discussed in Peter Aufrichtig's 'Copyright Protection for Computer Programs in Read Only Memory Chips', *op cit*, pp 329-370.

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fashion-conscious law) is to produce a utilitarian object meant to provide protection from the elements and a degree of privacy for the body inside it.

What then of a video game? Is this an original work of authorship? Is it utilitarian in essence? And if it is eligible for copyright, what element or aspect of it, exactly, is it that shall receive this copyright? The process of mechanical reproduction had assured that the copyright registration of one particular copy of a work would automatically insure protection for all its duplicates. Even traditional games like *Monopoly*, which might produce different outcomes at each playing, were identical to one another in their physical and visible parts. But the only visible part of a video game is its video display. The display is highly ephemeral and varies in detail with each play of the game. For a game like *Pac-Man* the notion of pursuit or pursuit through a maze would be too general. Like the notion of the western or the soap opera, it is too broad for copyright eligibility. Instead the key question is whether a general idea, like pursuit, is given concrete, distinctive, *expression*. The working out of this distinction, though, lends insight into the degree of difference between



'Intelligent system': the Macintosh II memory map.

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<sup>20</sup> E N Kramsky, *op cit*, p 342.

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<sup>21</sup> 214 US PQ 33, 7th Cir, 1982, p 33, 42, 43.

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mechanical reproduction and cybernetic systems perceived by the US judicial system.

For video games like *Pac-Man* a copyright procedure has developed that gives protection to the outward manifestation of the underlying software programs. Registration of a copyright does not involve depositing the algorithms structuring the software of the ROM (read-only memory) chip in which it is stored. Instead, registration requires the deposit of a videotape of the game in the play mode.<sup>20</sup>

Referring to requirements that copyright is for 'original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium', Federal District Courts have found that creativity directed to the end of presenting a video display constitutes recognisable authorship and 'fixation' occurs in the *repetition* of specific aspects of the visual scenes from one playing of a game to the next. But fixing precisely what constitutes repetition when subtle variations are also in play is not a simple matter. For example, in *Atari v North American Phillips Consumer Electronics Corp* (1981), one District Court denied infringement of Atari's *Pac-Man* by the defendant's *K.C. Munchkin*. The decision rested on a series of particular differences between the games despite overall similarities. In elaboration, the court noted that the Munchkin character, unlike *Pac-Man*, 'initially faces the viewer rather than showing a profile'. *K.C. Munchkin* moves in profile but when he stops, 'he turns around to face the viewer with another smile'. Thus the central character is made to have a personality which the central character in *Pac-Man* does not have. *K.C. Munchkin* has munchers which are 'spookier' than the goblins in *Pac-Man*. Their legs are longer and move more dramatically, their eyes are vacant – all features absent from *Pac-Man*.

This opinion, however, was overturned in *Atari vs North American Phillips* (1982). The Seventh Circuit Court found *Pac-Man*'s expressive distinctiveness to lie in the articulation of a particular kind of pursuit by means of 'gobbler' and 'ghost-figures', thereby granting broad protection to the game by likening it to a film genre or sub-genre. The Circuit Court found the Munchkin's actions of gobbling and disappearing to be 'blatantly similar' and went on to cut through to the basic source of the game's appeal, and marketability:

*Video-games, unlike an artist's painting or even other audio visual works, appeal to an audience that is fairly indiscriminating insofar as their concern about more subtle differences in artistic expression. The main attraction of a game such as Pac-Man lies in the stimulation provided by the intensity of the competition. A person who is entranced by the play of the game, 'would be disposed to overlook' many of the minor differences in detail and 'regard their aesthetic appeal as the same'.<sup>21</sup>*

In this decision, the Court stresses the process of absorption and feedback sustained by an automated but intelligent system that can simulate the reality of pursuit. The decision represents quite a remarkable set of

observations. The fetishisation of the image as object of desire transforms into a fetishisation of a process as object of desire. This throws as much emphasis on the mental state of the participant as on the exact visual qualities of the representation ('A person who is entranced by the play of the game').

In these cases the courts have clearly recognised the need to guarantee the exclusive rights of authors and inventors (and of the corporations that employ them) to the fruits of their discoveries. Simultaneously, this recognition has served to legitimate the cybernetic metaphor and to renormalise the political-legal apparatus in relation to the question: Who shall have the right to control the cybernetic system of which we are a part? On the whole, the decisions have funnelled that control back to a discrete proprietor, making what is potentially disruptive once again consonant with the social formation it threatens to disrupt.

Such decisions may require recasting the legal framework itself and its legitimising discourse. Paula Samuelson identifies the magnitude of the transformation at work quite tellingly, 'It [is] necessary to reconceptualize copyright and patent in ways that would free the systems from the historical subjects to which they have been applied. It [is] necessary to rethink the legal forms, pare them down to a more essential base, and adjust their rules accordingly. It [is] necessary to reconceive the social bargain they now reflect.'<sup>22</sup>

If efforts to gain proprietary control of computer chip masks, software and video games have prompted little radical challenge from the left, the same cannot be said for bacteria and babies, for, that is, the issues of proprietorship that are raised by new forms of artificial life and artificial procreation where the 'social bargain' woven into our discursive formations undergoes massive transformation.

The hidden agenda of mastery and control, the masculinist bias at work in video games, in Star Wars, in the reality of the simulation (of invasions, raids and wars), in the masculine need for autonomy and control as it corresponds to the logic of a capitalist marketplace becomes dramatically obvious when we look at the artificial reproduction of human life. The human as a metaphorical, automated, but intelligent system becomes quite literal when the human organism is itself a product of planned engineering.

Gametes, embryos, and fetuses become, like other forms of engineered intelligence that have gained legal status, babies-to-be, subject now to the rules and procedures of commodity exchange. Human life, like Baby M herself, becomes in every sense a commodity to be contracted for, subject to the proprietary control of those who rent the uterus, or the test tube, where such entities undergo gestation.

As one expert in the engineering of human prototypes put it, reproduction in the laboratory is willed, chosen, purposed and controlled and is, therefore, more human than coitus with all its vagaries and elements of chance.<sup>23</sup> Such engineering affirms the 'contractor's' rights to 'take positive steps to enhance the possibility that offspring will have

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<sup>22</sup> Paula Samuelson, 'Creating a New Kind of Intellectual Property: Applying the Lessons of the Chip Law to Computer Programs', *Minnesota Law Review* no 70, December 1985, p 502.

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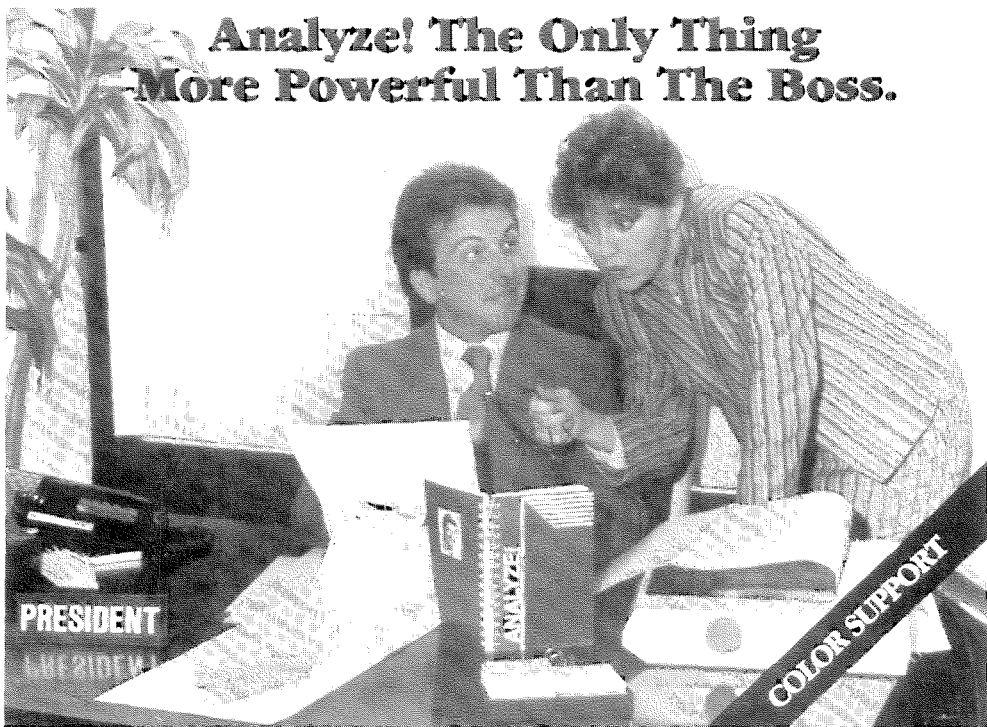
<sup>23</sup> Cited in Christine Overall, "'Pluck a Fetus From its Womb': A Critique of Current Attitudes Toward the Embryo/Fetus", *University of Western Ontario Law Review* vol 24 no 1, 1986, pp 6-7.

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desired characteristics' as well as the converse right to abort or terminate offspring with undesired or undesirable characteristics.<sup>21</sup> But what is most fundamentally at stake does not seem to be personal choice but power and economics. These opportunities shift reproduction from family life, private space and domestic relations to the realm of production itself by means of the medical expert, clinical space and commodity relations. The shift allows men who previously enjoyed the privilege of paying for their sexual pleasure without the fear of consequence the added opportunity of paying for their hereditary preferences without the fear of sexual pleasure.

Such 'engineered foetuses' and babies become so much like real human beings that their origin as commodities, bought and sold, may be readily obscured. They become the perfect cyborg. As with other instances in which a metaphor becomes operative and extends across the face of a culture, we have to ask who benefits, and who suffers? We have to ask what is at stake and how might struggle and contestation occur? What tools are at our disposal and what conception of the human do we adhere to that can call into question the reification, the commodification, the patterns of mastery and control that the human as cyborg, the cyborg as human, the simulation of reality and the reality of the simulation make evident?

Like the normalisation of the cybernetic metaphor as scientific



Social power and cybernetic technology: an American advertisement for Micro-Systems Software.



paradigm or the judicial legitimization of the private ownership of cybernetic systems (even when their substrate happens to be a living organism), the justification for hierarchical control of the cybernetic apparatus takes a rhetorical form because it is, in essence, an ideological argument. Dissent arises largely from those who appear destined to be controlled by the 'liberating force' of new cybernetic technologies. But in no arena will the technologies themselves be determining. In each instance of ideological contestation, what we discover is that the ambivalences regarding cybernetic technology require resolution on more fundamental ground: that domain devoted to a social theory of power.

### **Purpose, System, Power: Transformative Potential versus Conservative Practice**

Liberation from any literal referent beyond the simulation, like liberation from a cultural tradition bound to aura and ritual, brings the actual process of constructing meaning, and social reality, into sharper focus. This liberation also undercuts the Renaissance concept of the individual. 'Clear and distinct' people may be a prerequisite for an industrial economy based on the sale of labour power, but mutually dependent cyborgs may be a higher priority for a post-industrial post-modern economy. In an age of cybernetic systems, the very foundation of western culture and the very heart of its metaphysical tradition, the individual, with his or her inherent dilemmas of free will versus determinism, autonomy versus dependence and so on, may very well be destined to stand as a vestigial trace of concepts and traditions which are no longer pertinent.

The testing Benjamin found possible with mechanical reproduction – the ability to take things apart and reassemble them, using, in film, montage, the 'dynamite of the tenth of a second' – extends yet further with cybernetic systems: what had been mere possibilities or probabilities manifest themselves in the simulation. The dynamite of nanoseconds explodes the limits of our own mental landscape. What falls open to apperception is not just the relativism of social order and how, through recombination, liberation from imposed order is possible, but also the set of systemic principles governing order itself, its dependence on messages-in-circuit, regulated at higher levels to conform to predefined constraints. We discover how, by redefining those constraints, liberation from them is possible. Cybernetic systems and the cyborg as human metaphor refute a heritage that celebrates individual free will and subjectivity.

If there is liberating potential in this, it clearly is not in seeing ourselves as cogs in a machine or elements of a vast simulation, but rather in seeing ourselves as part of a larger whole that is self-regulating and capable of long-term survival. At present this larger whole remains dominated by parts that achieve hegemony. But the very apperception of the cybernetic connection, where system governs parts, where the

social collectivity of mind governs the autonomous ego of individualism, may also provide the adaptive concepts needed to decentre control and overturn hierarchy.

Conscious purpose guides the invention and legitimization of cybernetic systems. For the most part, this purpose has served the logic of capitalism, commodity exchange, control and hierarchy. Desire for short-term gain or immediate results gives priority to the criteria of predictability, reliability and quantifiability. Ironically, the survival of the system as a whole (the sum total of system *plus* environment on a global scale) takes a subordinate position to more immediate concerns. We remain largely unconscious of that total system that conscious purpose obscures. Our consciousness of something indicates the presence of a problem in need of solution, and cybernetic systems theory has mainly solved the problem of capitalist systems that exploit and deplete their human and natural environment, rather than conserving both themselves and their environment.

Anthony Wilden makes a highly germane observation about the zero-sum game, *Monopoly*. The goal of the game is to win by controlling the relevant environment, the properties and the capital they generate. But *Monopoly* and its intensification of rational, conscious purpose masks a logic in the form of being 'merely a game' that is deadly when applied to the open eco-system. Wilden writes, 'We usually fail to see that *Monopoly* supports the ideology of competition by basing itself on a logical and ecological absurdity. It is assumed that the winning player, having consumed all the resources of all the opponents, can actually survive the end of the game. In fact this is impossible. . . . The *Monopoly* winner . . . [must] die because in the context of the resources provided by the game, the winner has consumed them all, leaving no environment (no other players) to feed on.'<sup>25</sup>

'There is the discovery,' Gregory Bateson writes in one of his more apocalyptic essays, 'that man is only a part of larger systems and that the part can never control the whole.'<sup>26</sup> The cybernetic metaphor invites the testing of the purpose and logic of any given system against the goals of the larger eco-system where the unit of survival is the adaptive organism-in-relation-to-its-environment, not the monadic individual or any other part construing itself as autonomous or 'whole'<sup>27</sup>. 'Transgression does not negate an interdiction; it transcends and completes it.' The transgressive and liberating potential which Bataille found in the violation of taboos and prohibitions, and which Benjamin found in the potential of mechanically reproduced works of art persists in yet another form. The cybernetic metaphor contains the germ of an enhanced future inside a prevailing model that substitutes part for whole, simulation for real, cyborg for human, conscious purpose for the decentred goal-seeking of the totality – system plus environment. The task is not to overthrow the prevailing cybernetic model but to transgress its pre-defined interdictions and limits, using the dynamite of the apperceptive powers it has itself brought into being.

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony Wilden, 'Changing Frames of Order: Cybernetics and the Machina Mundi', in Kathleen Woodward (ed), *The Myths of Information*, op cit, p 240.

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Bateson, 'Conscious Purpose and Nature', in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, op cit, p 437.

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<sup>27</sup> Gregory Bateson, 'Style, Grace and Information in Primitive Art', *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, op cit, p 145.

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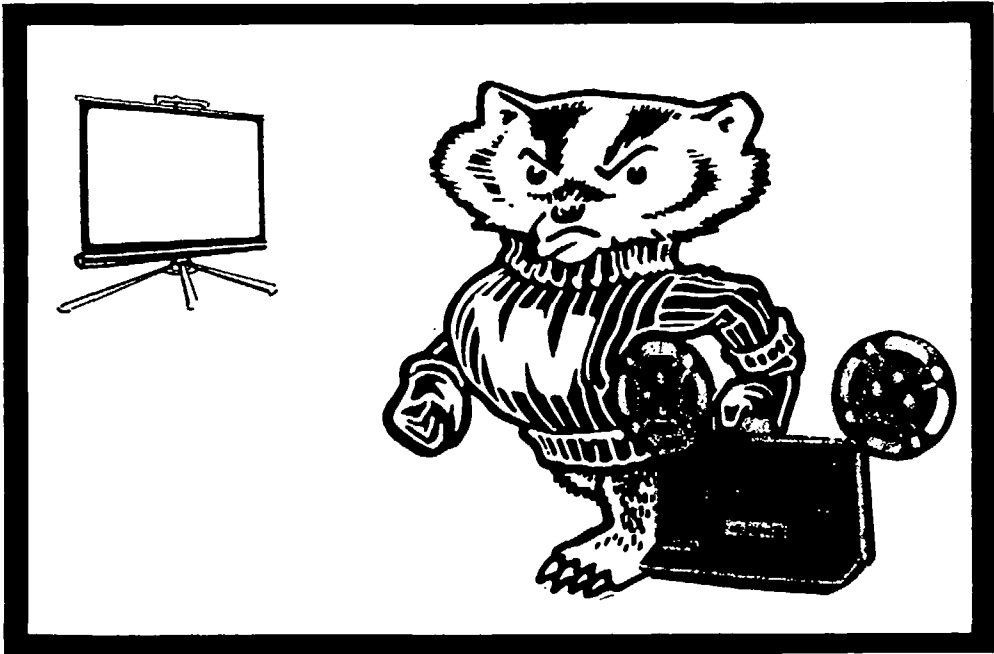


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# WISCONSIN PROJECT OR KING'S PROJECTION?

BY KRISTIN THOMPSON



A Wisconsin project? The University's emblematic badger brandishes the tools of his trade.  
(Collage courtesy of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.)

<sup>1</sup> David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, London,

HAVING SPENT THREE YEARS researching and writing a portion of a lengthy book like *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*<sup>1</sup>, I am of course flattered to find a reviewer spending so much effort and verbiage in discussing it. I could not help being surprised, however, to have my portion of that work suddenly taken up into a larger, apparently unified, and even completed entity called by Barry

King the 'Wisconsin project'<sup>2</sup>. Living and working in Wisconsin as I do, I realise that there is no such project, and I cannot help but think that some of King's miscomprehensions and misrepresentations of the three books he deals with result from some notion that people who have studied or taught film at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have been in cahoots to perpetrate a monolithic 'poetics of cinema' on an unsuspecting world of film studies.

To begin with, then, there *is* no 'Wisconsin project'. Indeed, the amazing thing to me, in Madison for fourteen years now, is, given the large amount of work that has come out of this school, how little of it can be gathered together and seen as a unified enterprise. We have had professors and graduates publish on United Artists' corporate history (Tino Balio), early animation (Donald Crafton), the Balaban and Katz theatre chain (Douglas Gomery), Alexander Dovzhenko (Vance Kepley), John Ford westerns (Peter Lehman), American avant-garde cinema (J J Murphy), Pop and Minimalist American film (James Peterson), theories of filmic closure (Richard Neupert), 1940s publicity (Mary Beth Haralovich), Nagisa Oshima (Maureen Turim), early film-making in Colorado (Diane Waldman), and on and on, but little of it adds up to a whole. Probably the only people who can be said to have worked together consistently on a specific 'project' – an historical poetics of cinema and a history of certain aspects of dominant and alternative styles are David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. Other faculty members and graduates have consistently shown considerable originality and independence in formulating research projects. Janet Staiger was asked by us to collaborate on *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* specifically because she had already demonstrated an expertise in the area of Hollywood production practices, and that was a subject different from the ones on which we were working. Her participation in the project made it possible for the three of us to cover the classical Hollywood cinema more thoroughly – it did not simply reinforce some existing notion of that cinema. None of her subsequent work has been similar to either of ours, nor has it adhered to any 'Wisconsin project' – and we would hardly expect that it would.

Similarly, Edward Branigan has gone in distinctive directions which owe little to 'neoformalism' (though Branigan is certainly as well-informed about that approach as he is about many others). Indeed, though King may be surprised to hear it, we think it fortunate that there has been little or no institutionalisation of neoformalism, or the historical poetics of cinema, or 'the Wisconsin project', of whatever readers would care to call it, beyond our own work. We would like to think that, if there is a 'Wisconsin' anything, it consists of a group of scholars committed to exploring various historical and aesthetic aspects of cinema – but they do not, on the whole, work together in programmatic ways.

It may seem that I am making too much of King's phrase, 'the Wisconsin project'. Yet the idea that three texts (written by four people)

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<sup>2</sup> Barry King, 'The Classical Hollywood Cinema', *Screen* November-December 1986, vol 27 no 6, p 74. Further references to this article will be indicated in the text after roman numeral I. See also part II, 'The Story Continues', *Screen* Summer 1987, vol 28 no 3, pp 56-82.

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<sup>3</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, London, Methuen University Paperback, 1986 (first published by the University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

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<sup>4</sup> James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983.

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<sup>5</sup> Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick, *British Cinema Now*, London, British Film Institute, 1985.

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Berlin, Mouton, 1984.

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are unified forms the basis of his entire, lengthy review. Presumably, if the books are not parts of a unified project (and they are not, though *Narration in the Fiction Film*<sup>3</sup> clearly holds many premises in common with *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*), then much of what he says is not valid. I will leave it to my colleagues' individual responses to demonstrate how diverse their opinions can be despite large areas of agreement.

Just as significantly, however, King begins and ends the first part of his review by implicitly contrasting 'the Wisconsin project' with 'the material conditions of British academia'. American institutional support, he states, made such a lengthy, heavily researched book as *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* possible. He contrasts it with such British books on British Film Year as *British Cinema History*<sup>4</sup> and *British Cinema Now*<sup>5</sup>, opining that they are speculative rather than conclusive because no British institutions would pay for the kind of research that went into *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

It is hard to tell whether this is simply disingenuous or deliberately slighting of British film scholarship. Of course, in some ways, it may be generally easier to do historical research in the USA because of the large, well-organised library system here; we also have more film archives (which are not infrequently used by British scholars). But much of what King says about British versus American institutions is inaccurate in relation to *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. I am a self-employed writer and had no grant support while working on *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. To travel for research and to write the book, I depended on my own income from writing and from a temporary half-time teaching position. I watched many of the relevant films in the very congenial facilities of the British Film Institute. Moreover, we could not find an American press willing to publish our manuscript; it was brought out by a British press, Routledge and Kegan Paul. Similarly, Branigan's book was published by Mouton<sup>6</sup>. Thus two of the three books King is reviewing were not published by US presses, though he does not mention that fact.

More importantly, King's point about British versus American institutions slights the work of many fine historians based in Britain. For all one could tell by reading his review, film history is virtually dead in the United Kingdom. What of Charles Barr, Richard Maltby, Robert Murphy, Vincent Porter, Sarah Street, David Welch, Nancy Wood and others? What about the government-supported project to add two volumes to the Rachel Low history of British cinema? (King may not ultimately like the results, but he can hardly deny that this project involves institutional support of a type at least equal to that available in the USA.) Moreover, until recently Britain had the only film journal devoted entirely to historical inquiry, the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, based in Oxford. The various British Film Institute publishing projects have, alas, no equivalent in the States. (The American Film Institute offers virtually no support to academics.) Whatever differences we may have with Barry Salt on methodological

and factual grounds<sup>7</sup>, there can be no denying that he has produced a major historical study, *in England*, and with little institutional support – a study which King refers to in passing but which neither he nor *Screen* has apparently found worthy of close analysis. ('Exegetes', we are told, would be rewarded by comparing our book with Salt's – people, that is, who have some knowledge of the historical topics dealt with?)

King's paragraph (I, p 74) dismissing British institutions and scholarship, inaccurate and ungracious though it may be, bears an interesting relationship to the conclusion of his review:

*If, on the other hand, the authors are prepared to see the classical paradigm as a regulatory formation aimed at containing moments of 'excess' within Hollywood's own practices, achieving only moments of unstable equilibrium, then most – but not all – of what is problematic in their account can be reconciled. Whether they are prepared to take this step is uncertain, but I suspect that in the future use of their work it will be taken for them.* (I, p 88)

In the past there has been a tendency for a certain type of Marxist film historian to seize upon previous historical work and to offer a new interpretation of the data presented there. Such writers basically rely upon data from older, more traditional historians, rewriting their accounts from a Marxist perspective. Bordwell and I have offered a critique of this tendency in relation to the early American cinema, as epitomised by Jean-Louis Comolli and Noël Burch. (Among other things, we suggest there that film history is at such an early stage that we cannot trust in the accuracy of most accounts so far published.<sup>8</sup>) Such historians have offered promissory notes for the establishment of a new view of film history, but we are still awaiting the result.

Few of these rewriters of other people's work have been so forthright about their activities as King. He calls for the old process to begin anew: Marxists should make 'use' of our work and rewrite it in a fashion that would be correct by his lights. King never suggests that these future historians (whom he drafts so blithely into work that he obviously is not keen to tackle) should go out and put in some time in the archives and libraries – just lift it all and straighten it out.

Here is where King's view of the lack of institutional support comes back. Presumably he thinks these future histories will *have* to take their data from books like *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, because the British can't get grants. Of course, our work was published in part so that future historians could use it as a source for their own work. But I cannot believe that King's recommendations at the end of Part I add up to a healthy prescription for a vigorous Marxist rewriting of film history. (Whether we have at least contributed to such a rewriting is clearly a matter for dispute, but I cannot conclude that further work in this direction should follow King's proposed lines.)

These are my main general objections to King's review of *The*

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<sup>7</sup> See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 'Toward a Scientific Film History?' *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Summer 1985, vol 10 no 3, pp 224-237.

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<sup>8</sup> See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 'Linearity, Materialism and the Study of the Early American Cinema', *Wide Angle* vol 5 no 3, 1983, pp 4-15.

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<sup>9</sup> See 'The Formalist from Iowa, USA, Who Fell in Love with Ivan the Terrible', *Film News*, February-March 1986, p 10.

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*Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Most of his detailed analysis is devoted to the work of my colleagues, and I will leave it to them to answer him more specifically. Before closing, I have some responses to some local points King makes.

*The Classical Hollywood Cinema* contains no discussion of 'the evolution of specific techniques', as King states (I, p 85). Changes, yes; evolution, no. Perhaps King is thinking again of Barry Salt. (Salt, surprisingly, appears as a motif against us in King's review. Little though King may sympathise with us, he should sympathise with Salt less – and I suspect this is one point upon which we and Salt would agree.)

King concludes that 'Thus it is necessary to assume that the criterion of aesthetic pertinence governs the scrutiny of the sample' (I, p 86). This is not news, since it is one of the basic premises of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* – as evidenced by a portion of the subtitle, 'Film Style'. King need hardly treat as a point against us the fact that he has discovered one of our main stated aims.

King quotes an interview with me<sup>9</sup> stating that some of the deep focus in *Citizen Kane* involves shot/reverse shot and hence conforms to the Hollywood continuity editing system (I, p 87). He considers that this example is 'striking, if not entirely consistent' (I, p 86): 'So much for the grain of the text' (I, p 87). I presume he implies here that I am claiming in the interview that as a result of its use of shot/reverse shot, *Kane* is no different from other Hollywood films. Again, King is assuming that this mythical 'Wisconsin project' is all one thing. I would suggest that if one looks at the same film as part of two different studies and asks two significantly different questions about it, the fact that one comes up with different analyses of it does not constitute 'inconsistency'. If one asks whether *Kane* violates Hollywood continuity rules, the fact that its deep focus generally uses shot/reverse shot would indicate that it probably remains within the wide range of possibilities allowed by the Hollywood system. (And if our book demonstrated nothing else, I hope it at least showed that the classical Hollywood cinema is not the monolith it was often held to be.) If, however, one is analysing *Kane* as an individual film, or an example of Welles's work as an auteur, or whatever, one might wish to emphasise its *differences* from previous Hollywood films in its use of shot/reverse shot. After all, 'the grain of the text' does not exist outside history. It is relative and historically specific, existing only in relation to other films, genres, etc. The practice of placing individual films against a variety of backgrounds, when done with proper historical grounding, does not equal mere inconsistency. Moreover, to single out one element in a film or scene does not exhaust the film; it may contain many other elements, also relevant to 'the grain of the text'. King seems to assume that a single scene can be used as only one type of evidence. Such a position would be empiricist in the extreme.

We would never say, as King claims (I, p 82), that the *fabula* is 'always given in advance of its technical embodiment'. The *fabula* is the product of the spectator's active engagement with the *syuzhet* as embodied in the



film as viewed. This mistake probably comes from King's dependence on Fredric Jameson's inaccurate account of the Russian Formalists' work in *The Prison-House of Language*.<sup>10</sup>

King accuses us of adopting a position which 'abandons' meaning by subsuming it under the overall question of form (I, 82). We do abandon the idea of 'content', preferring to stick to the idea of 'meaning'. But to 'subsume' meaning into form hardly implies that we abandon or ignore it. Quite the contrary, all our analyses assume that meaning (including ideological meaning) is an important component of form. King again quotes a passage from an interview with me and manages to suggest that we are totally uninterested in meaning, although in that interview I emphasise that neoformalism analyses meaning along with all the other components of a film. I am sure that we do not privilege meaning to the extent that King would wish, but this is no reason for him to claim that we 'abandon' it.

King asserts that the criteria for successful technical innovation that I outline on pp 264 and 270 of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* are obvious and hence, he claims, uninformative. 'One would like to know what regime of visual representation would not require those qualities as *basic*' (I, p 83). There are at least three responses to this question. First, even if there is no such 'regime', that doesn't mean that it is not useful to lay the criteria out explicitly. Most people probably do not think about them when considering the introduction of technologies. (And, given that King is calling for a Marxist rewriting of history, is it not one traditional aim of Marxism to point out how very basic ideas have been naturalised in society?) Secondly, I *do* point out in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* that during the era of the Motion Picture Patents Company the desire to acquire a camera that did not violate patents rights took precedence over considerations of visual quality and shooting efficiency. Thirdly, there is a multidimensional aspect to technical innovation. Two cameras, say, might have very similar characteristics, and the historians would have to look closely to determine why one was adopted and the other was not. Competing technologies have degrees of difference and tiny trade-offs in advantages. The Bell & Howell's superior pilot-pin registration system competed against the Mitchell's faster focusing system throughout the 1920s, and ultimately only the introduction of sound allowed the Mitchell to triumph, due to its quieter running. Such apparently minor advantages and disadvantages can only be compared if the historian has some notion of systematic criteria for technological innovation.

Apparently such specific historical points are not Mr King's *forte*, as he leaves it to others to discuss whether our book actually gives a coherent, accurate and thorough account of Hollywood cinema.

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<sup>10</sup>Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972.

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# READING KING'S READING

BY JANET STAIGER

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<sup>1</sup> Barry King, 'The Story Continues: Barry King Returns to the Wisconsin Project', *Screen* Summer 1987, vol 28 no 3, p 56. Hereafter, King's review and our book will be referenced in this essay as follows: I, for King, 'The Classical Hollywood Cinema': A Review by Barry King', *Screen* November-December 1986, vol 27 no 6, pp 74-88; II, for King, 'The Story Continues'; and *CHC*, for *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

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<sup>2</sup> I hope that as a postmodernist King will appreciate my rewriting of one of his sentences (II, pp 56-7).

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GIVEN BARRY KING'S explicit allegiance to 'deconstruction, Lacanian feminism and postmodernism [sic] – [which challenge] the concept of a "master" narrative of rationality'<sup>1</sup>, like a docile post-structuralist, I accept the constraint of considering this review on its own terms, the better, I think, to indicate what it systematically elides<sup>2</sup>. Hence, King's reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* must be praised for its contradictions, excesses, and lacks – in sum, its symptomatic figures of desire. In fact, given my recent research interests in the historical spectator and the institutional, ideological, and psychoanalytical apparatuses constituting readings of texts, I would argue that this review says as much about the function of the reviewer-as-reader as about *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*-as-text. In that regard, an analysis of the King review is intriguing as an alternative to my own reading as well as other reviews of the book. Although my focus will be on Part I of the review, what I will do is implicitly and (now not so) covertly a gesture toward King's notion of 'a Wisconsin Project' and to Part II of the review.

Let me take, as an introduction, King's central and admonishing concluding remark for Part I:

*This procedure, which makes style the 'Logos' of an expressive totality, means that contradictory tensions within 'classical' film-making are suppressed and, given the global dominance of Hollywood, that alternative modes of representation are only locatable at the margin. If, on the other hand, the authors are prepared to see the classical paradigm as a regulatory formation aimed at containing moments of 'excess' within Hollywood's own practices, achieving only moments of unstable equilibrium, then most – but not all – of what is problematic in their account can be reconciled. Whether they are prepared to take this step is uncertain, but I suspect that in the future use of their work it will be taken for them.* (I, p 88)

Now as another reader of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, I understood the text as not only having taken that step but providing ample evidence

and argumentation as to how such a textual analysis could be related to extra-textual determinants. Perhaps Thomas Elsaesser's synopsis of the book's project in his review in *American Film* is close to my reading of it:

*What emerges is less how the industry saw itself or wanted to be seen by the public, than how it defended, argued, and rationalized its working methods, behavior, and standard practices into a system of limits and possibilities, constraints and priorities, which were themselves expressed as rules – of what was correct and what wasn't. On closer inspection, however, these rules turn out to be a necessarily and cunningly flexible game of give-and-take, whereby the industry both absorbs change and contains its disrupting effects. At the same time, Hollywood is able to reward individual excellence and talent, while protecting itself against its excesses.*<sup>3</sup>

Or as Tom Gunning reads the book for a *Wide Angle* review:

*The core of this work lies in this dialectical relation between technical and stylistic innovation and the enduring demand for narrative coherence. As stable as this model may appear, it is, in fact, a figure of regulated tension. . . . This regulation is a dynamic process, a process of change within limits. . . . A number of . . . technical or stylistic devices are investigated in the same way: first posing a problem for the classical paradigm, then undergoing a process of adaptation in which any potentially disruptive aspects are brought into line with narrative continuity.*<sup>4</sup>

Gunning's latter remark also indicates that what is a textual process may likewise function diachronically through the era of Hollywood's international dominance. Thus, King's search for a conclusion in the book that matches his expectations, bred out of *Screen*'s theoretical studies of the characteristics of the classical paradigm, is, for other readers, already met both at the site of the text and at a very specific historical level (that of periods located in groups of even a few years).

Respecting the reader as a historically constituted subject, I would make no judgment as to the most valid interpretation, assuming as I do that multiple ideological, political, social, and psychoanalytical factors form the background for King's and the others' readings. Consequently, it would be presumptuous of me to argue that King's reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is wrong (even if it seems at odds with the others or my own) since such a notion of 'error' disappears in post-structuralist 'negative hermeneutics'. Finally, having no clinical or biographical access to King-as-reader, my comments should be understood as addressed to the review-as-text, not to King-as-subject.

Yet it does seem that some sketching out of the sites of difference between King's and my reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* would be beneficial for those other readers who may wish to consider any 'future use' of the work. In this regard, three areas of concern seem crucial for extended discussion: the problem of 'primary determinants'

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'What makes Hollywood Run?', *American Film*, May 1985, p 53. [Italics in original.]

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<sup>4</sup> "The Classical Hollywood Cinema", *Wide Angle* 1985, vol 7, no 3, p 76.

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<sup>5</sup> Taking a position on the text and the historical reader close to that of Tony Bennett in 'Text and Social Process: the Case of James Bond', *Screen Education* Winter/Spring 1982, no 41, pp 3-14, I have difficulty with the notion of 'in a text'. For the purposes of this essay, however, I can point to the material evidence of sentences printed in the book, to be considered by 'future users' of the work.

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<sup>6</sup> At the most general level of history, I would argue that the primary determinant is economic – 'in the last instance' – but here we are dealing with an 'origin' dated circa 1895-96, and it seems to me that 'the last instance' is quite vague in terms of its effectivity (or explanatory power).

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in contemporary media studies; the notion of 'class conflict' in film history; and the place of 'difference' in the classical Hollywood cinema. I shall suggest that where King's reading and mine differ is in disagreements as to the logic of what was 'in'<sup>5</sup> the book and to what was – or was not – left out. As he puts it, he will 'challenge' the book 'not on grounds of alternative evidence or an alternative reading of the same evidence, but in terms of the coherence of the arguments presented and their relationship to arguments not presented' (I, p 75). I believe that his reading fails to do the former, although it might do the latter through challenging the book by projecting an alternative hypothetical history and through an alternative reading of the same sentences. Two related questions arise: how does King read the book? And, are other readings of it plausible? In a brief preview of the answer to the first question, King reads through strategies such as taking sentences out of context, ignoring companion sentences, conflating separate terms, and not seeing the conjunction 'and'.

## I. 'Primary determinants' in contemporary media studies

One of the major thrusts of King's reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is that despite the book's apparent nod to economic determination its interest in the impact that 'style' had on the mode of production ultimately produces a formalist analysis in which meaning is subsumed to form and 'the "economic" becomes only the bearer of "style"' (I, p 81). Alternatively, I would read the book as privileging neither economic nor ideological/signifying practices as determinant. Three differences exist between these readings. One is somewhat ambiguous. At this level of historical specificity<sup>6</sup>, I wish to allow for at least two 'primary determinants' while it is only clear that King considers 'style' fallacious as a primary one. In addition, I use the term 'practices' to underline the material activities in human praxis as opposed to any idealist 'cause'. Most significantly, however, I employ the phrase 'ideological/signifying' as one of the two practices I believe are most pertinent to understanding the construction of the Hollywood mode of production. Surprisingly, to my knowledge, no reviewer of the book has made particular note of this distinction between my sections of the book and those authored by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. This phrase (used despite objections by my co-authors) is an excellent marker of the 'incoherence' of our text, but one King does not choose to examine since he seems to project our flaws elsewhere.

Now to what extent, if any, my colleagues 'unequivocally adopt' 'an approach which abandons the question of meaning altogether, usually by the mechanism of rendering all "content" an equal, hence redundant, expression of form' (I, p 82), I know they are more than competent to answer. Yet I purposefully choose the phrase 'ideological/signifying practices' to emphasise 1) that what was being produced by Hollywood

were cultural and discursive texts, with meaning-making as much a determining practice as the economic<sup>7</sup>; 2) that as a discursive act, films were extra-textually connected to, but not a one-to-one reflection of, their social formation; and 3) that ideology and signification should not be considered reducible to one another. It is, in fact, for me this practice which has been too often neglected in previous studies of the mode of production, to the detriment of historiographical advances in media history. Earlier approaches to the American film industry have appropriately noticed the industry's relation to capitalist tactics of mass production but, as others before me have mentioned, distinctions must be made for cultural objects that operate overtly as signifying. Yet King's reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* ignores the explicit and potential implications of the use of this phrase in the sections signed 'Staiger'. If I have used this phrase, 'ideological/signifying practices' as one of two salient determinants for the mode of production and the industry's products, then how can King suggest that my 'account [which is] so apparently committed to the enumeration of concrete organisational and institutional detail' (I, p 77) becomes 'a pretext for the demonstration of the primacy of style' (I, p 77)?

He argues this in two ways. First, he cites parts of a passage in which he quotes me as writing that 'in the balance between economical production and a presumed effect on film, the latter won out (*CHC*, p 89)' (I, p 77). To what does 'latter' refer? It is King's referent 'filmic effect', but the context of the quotation is concluding a specific example – the development of editing practices which included multiple workers, a sequence of labour, and written directions to maintain specific group norms of specific ideological/signifying practices materially and formally apparent through 'style'. Symptomatically, the reading operates by displacement from the book's discussion of editing to the reading's cutting out of the sentence which follows the cited passage, the lack of which is telling for the reading's representation of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. The sentence that follows is: 'Thus, while economic practices helped produce a divided labor system of filmmaking, in many cases, ideological/ signifying practices influenced how the firms divided that labor' (*CHC*, p 89). Not only does the deleted sentence operate to place economic practices in a primary position (a statement qualified by recognition of the function of adjacent media industries to serve as models for this industry's mode of production) but it does not equate 'style' with 'ideological/signifying practices'. Figures of editing are, of course, 'style', but figures of editing are produced from historical and cultural notions of effective discursivity as well as functioning as bearers of traces of the ideologies (in the plural) which produced those notions. Hence I read this passage as suggesting not the 'primacy of style' but, if anything, a primacy of the economic practices and a potential and occasional tension (not a unification or symmetry) with ideological/signifying practices. Thus, this passage could be understood as rejecting any strong sense of economic determinism across both why

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<sup>7</sup> Although I tend to appreciate Elsaesser's comments that Hollywood might be better considered a service industry. See his 'Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema', in Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (eds), *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices*, Frederick, Maryland, University Publications of America, 1984, p 49.

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and how labour was divided while remaining cognisant of its critical place in material history.

In fact, King's reading may seem to anticipate such an alternative understanding of the book. For later he writes, 'I have suggested that the terms of the analysis of the "economic" in fact lead to the primacy of the "stylistic", not by means of a denial of economic influence, which would be absurd, but by a relative negation of its full effectivity. The most obvious, as opposed to discursively embedded, example of this turns around the treatment of the concept of mass production' (I, p 79). Yet, if one re-reads the above passage from *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (p 89), one might perceive a telling distinction made between explaining *why* divided labour was employed (economic determination) *versus how* it was divided (economic and ideological/signifying). Actually, in re-reading my text of several years ago, I am somewhat embarrassed today to find this passage so economically determined, reconciling myself with the knowledge that overall I try to avoid a vulgar economic determination model.

I would also recall here what the last twenty years of radical historiographers have attempted to avoid and that is earlier tendencies toward a grand synthesis, claiming one or a particular set of determinants as accounting for all historical process. Such monolithic theories of causation or mechanistic structuralisms, as others have noted, operate in the vacuum of theoreticism. Such approaches ultimately impoverish our knowledge of the historical real. Hence, I read *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* as trying to specify how a capitalist economy and divided labour may have been signally involved with the overall choice of a mode of production. Yet the methods of dividing that labour cannot be linked just to capitalist exploitation of labour but also to ideological/signifying practices related to (but not totally or even uniformly) bourgeois systems of representation. On the contrary, I wonder how a solely economic determination/bourgeois representation model of this medium's history could explain *how* Hollywood's labour was divided. But of course such a question is not necessarily implied by King's reading since he takes no position regarding a preferred reading of the same or other evidence.

The second way King reads *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* as suppressing the primacy of style is through my having written 'a merely formalist treatment of the empirical details involved' (I, p 77) since I choose 'a *material* rather than a *social* definition of the concept of mode of production' (I, p 78, italics in original). In reading this reading, it is not clear to me to what King's attribution of 'formalist' in 'formalist treatment' applies. One way to take it is that the formalism arises from having chosen a particular type of definition ('material' rather than 'social'). However, he does not pursue how this choice results in 'style' becoming a primary determinant, shifting instead to queries about the place of class exploitation and the appropriation of surplus value in my theory. Whether or not I neglect these as he charges will be discussed below, but a material definition of the mode of production does not

invariably – or even plausibly – result in the consequences of a theory that media history is determined by style. It can only occur in a reading which operates through condensing the notion of the type of definition ('material') with the projected historical determinant ('style').

Another way to understand to what 'formalist' refers is to read it as describing the type of history being written; that is, my method of writing a history is 'formalist'. Again, however, the question is how King can then read my primary determinant as style, and the answer is much the same as the above instance. This can be accomplished through conflating the historiographical method with the meaning of what I am saying. In other words, my form (a formalist historiographical method – whatever that might be) determines my content ('form/style' determines film history). Perhaps we should welcome King to the 'Wisconsin Project'.

In thinking through these alternative readings of 'primary determinations' in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, it might do 'future users' well to observe several of King's reading procedures (ignoring terminological differences among the various sections, quoting only parts of passages, and conflating distinct notions) in operation in one other area of contemporary media studies – the question of determinants for a history of the conditions of reception. In King's discussion of the book's notion of what might be 'an adequate history of the reception of the classical Hollywood film' (CHC, p xiv), he writes the following paragraph:

*The normative ingredients of this mode of film practice also include certain assumptions about the activities of the spectator. But since the authors take the realms of style and production as primary, these matters, plus the question of the concrete conditions of reception, are not accorded extended treatment. For all that, the authors introduce certain issues concerning the spectator's activity and the role of advertising in the establishment of classical canons, that will be 'necessary' in any future study of consumption (p xiv). The degree to which this is both an understatement and an overstatement will be explored in part two of this review.* (I, p 76)

Compare that with the referenced paragraph in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*:

*If we have taken the realms of style and production as primary, it is not because we consider the concrete conditions of reception unimportant. Certainly conditions of consumption form a part of any mode of film practice. An adequate history of the reception of the classical Hollywood film would have to examine the changing theater situation, the history of publicity, and the role of social class, aesthetic tradition, and ideology in constituting the audience. This history, as yet unwritten, would require another book, possibly one as long as this. While we have not treated reception fully, the present book does introduce certain issues – e.g., the activities which the Hollywood film solicits from the spectator, or the importance of early advertising in establishing classical canons – which we believe to be necessary to any*

*future study of how the classical film has been consumed under specific circumstances.*  
(CHC, p xiv)

By deleting critical determinants including 'the role of social class, aesthetic tradition, and ideology' (which would, in fact, suggest a representation of history which is not a 'formalism'), through recasting the thrust of the paragraph, and by failing to mark quoted phrases as taken from the book, King's review appropriates the concepts introduced in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* as its own but different. As noted above, given the review's allegiances to 'deconstruction, Lacanian feminism, and postmodernism', the review should not consider this an embarrassment although it is unclear how it fits with an expressed concern for 'the forms in which surplus labour, surplus product or surplus value are extracted from the direct producers' (I, 78).

These strategies of reading are supplemented by another method which also impinges on possible interpretations of what constitutes primary determinants in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. King's reading seems to work through constructing oppositions that may – or may not – be read as such. For instance, King writes:

*As a nominal concept, the mode of film practice is defined as consisting of two inter-related moments – a stylistic configuration demarcated by a 'set of widely held' – as opposed, one takes it, to hegemonically reproduced – norms 'about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique'.*  
(I, p 76, citing CHC, p xiv)

First of all the original passage reads:

*A mode of film practice, then, consists of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production. These norms constitute a determinate set of assumptions about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique, and about the activities of the spectator.*  
(CHC, p xiv)

But more important is the inserted phrase, 'as opposed, one take it, to hegemonically reproduced'. A reader could, of course, 'take it' as an old idealist *weltanschauung*, but it is not clear to me why 'one' (unless she were King) *must* 'take it' as oppositional particularly since, as King has indicated (I, p 75), the book has signalled its allegiance to a Marxist cultural materialism and has just cited Raymond Williams as having 'posed the problem' of situating 'textual processes in their most pertinent and proximate collective context' (CHC, p xiv). In fact, 'one' might just as likely assume that the phrase 'set of widely held stylistic norms' and the 'determinate set of assumptions' that they constitute might be referable to, say, Williams' definition of 'hegemony'.



*Now the theoretical model which I have been trying to work with is this. I would say that in any society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective. . . . In any case what I have in mind is the central effective and dominant systems of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived. That is why hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and his [sic] world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.<sup>8</sup>*

Now leaving aside the problems of King's failure to define what he means by 'hegemonically reproduced' norms or any problems with Williams' model, it is suggestive that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* specifically notes how this determinate set of assumptions is reproduced: 'Moreover, this commitment to particular practices was not due to some essentialist "force" but rather to specifiable discourses discussing, describing, and validating these practices' (*CHC*, p 88). Not only is this model a reasonable translation of Williams' concept of hegemony, but it is not at odds with a more generous reading of Althusser's theorising about Ideological State Apparatuses or notions such as Barthes' work on mythology. It is, of course, different from the older, more vulgar proposition of the infliction of the ruling class's ideology upon the repressed class.<sup>9</sup>

Finally in regard to the issue of primary determinants, I would suggest that I very much like Elsaesser's reading of this question:

*The authors' approach might easily have turned into an exercise of mechanical Marxism and determinist historiography, to prove that Hollywood was simply the result of material facts – the capitalist exploitation of certain technologies – translating themselves into a bourgeois ('realist') form of representation that the need to return profits on different kinds of investment shaped into standardization and rule-bound norms. Yet the overall thesis indicates, if anything, the reverse: both 'style' and 'mode of production' emerge as dependent on what I have so far deliberately kept off screen, so to speak, the fact that Hollywood is organized around the need and ability to tell stories.<sup>10</sup>*

Consequently, ideological/signifying practices, channelled through and against story-telling (which stretches beyond the period of capitalism and across multiple modes of production), complicate the history of the American film industry as a simply determined medium in a capitalist industry.

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *New Left Review* no 82, November-December 1973, p 8.

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<sup>9</sup> Another instance of this tendency to construct oppositions that may be reading projections as much as anything else is in the review's opening opposition postulating 'what may be called the Wisconsin project' as 'a strong foe' to the 'material conditions of British academia', and 'at a more immediate level', to *Screen* (I, p 74).

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'What Makes Hollywood Run?', op cit, pp 54-55.

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## II. 'Class conflict' in film history

King argues that to 'suppress' the book's real project of proving 'the primacy of style', my terminology and definitions (particularly for the mode of production) result in a representation of Hollywood which plays into this. In particular, he finds at least three problems. The first is that 'the term mode of production is sometimes rendered as a rough equivalent to production practices. . . .' (I, p 77) although at other times I seem to follow 'Marx's specification' by considering the mode of production as composed of '1) the labor force, 2) the means of production, and 3) the financing of production' (*CHC*, p 89). However, secondly, King asserts that 'Subsequently, any consideration of the form of finance, e.g. internal financing versus debt financing, or its source, e.g. banks or conglomerates, in the position of whole or part owner, is ruled out of consideration on the grounds, which can certainly be disputed, that this did not affect the management function' (I, p 77-78). The consequences of these first two acts are to exclude from consideration 'the provision of capital, whether in terms of plant or finance – not to mention the question of theatre ownership, distribution networks, etc . . .' (I, 78). Finally according to King, I define the mode of production by using Marx's '*material* rather than a *social* definition of the concept of a mode of production. (The latter would emphasise the relationships of expropriation and the forms in which surplus labour, surplus product or surplus value are extracted from the direct producers.) Accordingly, those looking for a history of class exploitation in Hollywood should look elsewhere.' (I, p 78, italics in original). King cites the works, 'for example', of Larry Ceplair and Steve Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, and Michael Nielsen, 'Toward a Workers' History of the U.S. Film Industry'.

Again, King's account is an intriguing reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. In this case, I might agree in part with him, for the book states: "Mode of production" will refer specifically to production practices. The "mode" is distinct from the "industry" which is the economic structure and conduct of the particular companies which produced, distributed, and exhibited the films' (*CHC*, p 89). Here, in re-reading the text, I dislike the book's phrasing for producing an unclear representation of the distinctions being laid out. Economists generally assume three structural levels for the American film industry: production, distribution, and exhibition. These may or may not be integrated formally or informally (through contractual agreements or merely a hand-shake). More significantly, though, each of these structural levels has its own mode – or modes – of production. Obviously, structural relations among the three levels and among companies within the whole industry inform the management decisions at any specific point, but I would point out that it would be inappropriate (and sloppy) thinking to confuse the issues of industrial structure, conduct and per-

formance with any specific level's modes of production (labour force, means of production and financing).

However, the rest of King's assertions seem to operate from reading strategies similar to those employed for the question of 'primary determinants'. Specifically, how can King's reading produce the assertions that the book 'rules out of consideration' the forms of finance and their sources as well as class conflict? The ways include not distinguishing among concepts being discussed, ignoring the area of determination being examined, and projecting theoretical expectations.

In the case of the question of finance, an alternative reading might focus on the difference between the notion of the forms and sources of finance and a particular type of economy – capitalism. Chapter 24 entitled 'The Labor-Force, financing and the mode of production' begins with the assertion that 'this chapter will look at two other aspects of the mode of production, the labor-force and the ownership and financing of the films' (*CHC*, p 311). Having previously acknowledged as a trivial cliché that the film industry was within a capitalist economy (*CHC*, p 88), the book questions the implications of this fact for *specific* instances of decision-making at the management level of film production – but not for specific instances of decision-making at the management level for industrial structure, conduct, or performance in which case it might be pertinent. As the chapter continues, it does rule out of consideration as *salient* determining factors any *specific* forms and sources of *capitalist* financing because it *extends* the implications of capitalist financing across a broader time frame. This results in capitalism having more profound effects than previously asserted but consequently less relevance as determining for any specific instance. In other words, the 'logic' of capitalism and the Hollywood concept of the quality film are so pervasive (or hegemonic) as motivating factors for production management – and labour – that it is meaningless to discuss any specific form or source of capitalist financing as a salient cause for management decisions, film practices, or production activities. Capitalism and this mode of film practice had so penetrated Hollywood from at least the mid-teens (and, I would argue, earlier) that it is superfluous to discuss any 'deepening' or variance of its effects.

Is such a reading of the position of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* possible? If this issue of financing is replaced within its context in chapter 24, it might be observed that it was being raised because I was disagreeing with earlier historians who imply that capitalist control is related to 'the vertical integration of the major studios, the conversion to sound, and the unionization of the labor-force' (*CHC*, p 311). The next sentence is 'What traditional historians have tended to ignore is that labor-force activities and financing *reinforced* rather than contradicted or changed the production system as it had been constructed' (*CHC*, p 311, *italics in original*). Now I believe that it is possible to read the text as excluding as pertinent the *forms and sources* of capitalist financing – but

not financing or capitalism – as pertinent since the argument is that capitalism was relevant from the start of the cinema rather than appearing in the 1920s and early 1930s. Hence, no initially innocent cinema exists to be ‘captured’ by capitalists, either in the teens by the middle class or 1926-33 by a Rockefeller-Morgan sphere of influence. Capitalist profit maximisation goals operate from the start, inflecting management choices. Since King has excluded from his argumentation any provision for alternative evidence or alternative readings of the same evidence, I am left to ponder why he projects the theoretical expectation that films financed by banks would be significantly different from ones produced by the major studios. As I cited Robert Sklar in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*: ‘there is “every indication that Wall Street’s interest coincided with that of Hollywood’s old hands – to make as much money as possible”’ (*CHC*, p 315). I would underline that this position regarding the relevance (or lack thereof) of forms and sources of monies applies only to management decisions regarding the notions of what constitutes profitable films but does not apply to decisions affecting industrial conduct and performance. (See *CHC*, pp 317-19.)

Regarding labour-force activities, it is the case, of course, that labour was exploited and conflict occurred, but I would prefer a reading that distinguishes among the notions of the labour-force, real or social class, class identification, class conflict, and union activities, that recognises salient causes, and that thinks through the dialectics of theoretical expectations and historical findings. Recent radical histories of the working class in the United States have produced much material which does not correspond to earlier theoretical expectations. Since the 1960s, historians of American labour have tried to erase older equations of ‘the workers equal union members’ (a slippage due in part to the importance and power of the Commons School), to comprehend the wide extremes in political views and actions of the working class, to examine the disparity between real and imagined class identifications, and to determine the place of middle-line workers in the older ‘two-class’ version of history. Yet, as I note in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, ‘Outside the scope of my question (although an important problem) is the determination of classes and the methods by which certain classes appropriate surplus value’ (*CHC*, p 89n), referring the reader to the theoretical work of Barry Hindness, Paul Q Hirst, Talal Asad, Harold Wolpe, and, later, Pat Walker, Nicos Poulantzas, and Erik Olin Wright (*CHC*, p 94n). Now why would I exclude the issue of classes from this question? Recall that what *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is attempting to explain is the relationship between a very specific (and dominant) film practice and its historical context. It is not addressing as its object of study the history of labour in Hollywood. Consequently, what the book does need to consider is the pertinence of the fact of class and class conflict to this film practice, and it argues that the fact of class and class conflict is not significant to this historical question – not that it is not significant to history.

Why is it not significant? Actually, the answer exists elsewhere in King's review when he interjects the notion of 'hegemonically reproduced' norms. Now if he uses that term in the older way, suggesting that a ruling class imposes ideologies on the working class, then class does matter. King's projected history of Hollywood would show that labourers in the working class held different norms of what the film practices should be and that union activities, other instances of class conflict, or hidden messages or aberrant techniques smuggled into the films were salient instances of the working class resisting the owners' notions of what a quality film was. However, if he means by it the more current version something along the lines of the definition I used from Williams, then it is less apparent that real class is at stake although class identification might matter. In that case, what is to be studied is the labourers' ideologies of 'quality' found through the material evidence of their discourses. And that was the function of citing manuals, articles and books by the Hollywood workers: indeed, if King wishes, a 'para-ideology' (I, p 87) that inhibits alternative practice. It goes back to the uncontested proposition that the members of the labour-force in Hollywood (no matter what were their 'real' classes and despite the fact of classes and the appropriation of surplus value) shared very similar opinions about film practice.

One other disparity between King's reading and mine is worth a special note: the effectivity of the unions in halting the incursion of new relations of labour and means of production that furthered fragmentation and deskilling. In the history of the American film industry, conflict with owners of the firms did appear most signally through unions, first through the lower work levels (projectionists, stagehands, carpenters and so on) and then into the middle levels (screenwriters, cameramen and actors). Unfortunately, the strategies that some specific unions employed only deepened their plight. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* specifically discusses examples of competing unions scabbing on striking unions and of negotiations among unions for strict jurisdictional boundaries which deepened the division among labourers (*CHC*, pp 311-12). In fact, the two sources that King cites as alternative histories of Hollywood labour only provide further evidence of the failure of union activities to halt fragmentation or deskilling – or to arrest significantly the appropriation of surplus value. Ceplair and Englund on the HUAC period point out how politically conservative leaders of some unions could use red-baiting to crush radical organisations, and Nielson's essay (as well as his doctoral thesis) outlines a sad story of racketeer control of craft unions and payoffs to union leaders to keep labour in line.<sup>11</sup>

I am personally<sup>12</sup> appalled that this is what happened, but asserting that 'craft unions, for example, do not reinforce the process of fragmentation and deskilling – a grossly insulting formulation as anyone familiar with the history of labour struggles in the film industry will know – but

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<sup>11</sup> Also useful, particularly since it attempts a theoretical explanation of the facts, is Ida Jeter, 'The Collapse of the Federated Motion Picture Crafts: A Case Study of Class Collaboration in the Motion Picture Industry', *University Film Producers Association Journal* 1979, vol 31 no 2, pp 37-45.

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<sup>12</sup> Extremely personally, since as the daughter of a nearly 50-year member of the International Typographical Union, I watched my father have to give up his craft (and his retirement funds) when his local union lost a strike attempting to halt the imposition of deskilling technology. As the first member of my family to even attend a university (much less to receive a PhD, linking me to the Wisconsin Project), I would rather that this piece of the history of unionism were not also part of my heritage.

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arrest its fullest implementation' (I, p 80) cannot provide any coherence or scope to explain these events. Since King declines providing alternative evidence, or even examining that supplied in the book, I suppose it would be outside the rules for our comparison of readings for me to request some explanation of the above assertion as it applies to the history of labour in the American film industry, based, as the assertion apparently is, on theoretical expectations about what ought to be the facts about craft unions.

But on this topic, King's line of reasoning in his reading can lead to another intriguing conclusion. He writes:

*If we allow that management can fail in this aim [of control over the labour process] or that sections of management are subject to the process of fragmentation as well, it still follows that somewhere in the work order agents are empowered to impart 'meaning' to the flow of product across routinised procedures. Such is the rationale for Staiger's typology in the first place. But one needn't accept the notion of 'creativity' or auteurism to recognise that **which** functionary, with **what** professional, social and personal characteristics, makes a difference to the way in which even a standardised ensemble of practices and techniques is activated.* (I, p 79, italics in original)

Since the point of his reading seems to be that the craft unions did provide some kind of significant causality for Hollywood film practice, that this is constituted in 'meaning', and that 'difference' comes from specific functionaries, then the 'excess' and 'grain of the text' he privileges might be as much from conservative and reactionary unionists as from any radicals. I suppose, however, King can read the difference.

### III. 'Difference' in the classical Hollywood cinema

In fact, 'creativity' seems to be the subtext to King's reading. For in his representation of the book, he focuses on only the first of the set of terms – 'standardisation and differentiation' – not seeing the conjunction 'and'. My reading of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is that the book attempts to handle not only why Hollywood films exhibit a consistency at a more general level but also – and just as significantly – inconsistencies and differences are abundant at more discrete levels – incoherencies, inconsistencies and differences among genres, teams of workers, films, and within a film.<sup>13</sup> Standardisation, yes, *but* for this economic system, differentiation as well. If the weight of the argumentation and evidence seems to fall to the former, it is in part because at least this author of the book believed it to be the less well characterised in previous histories and the more significant (theoretically and historically) to understand. The proposition of 'sameness' at one level of historical and theoretical discussion and the weight of argumentation does not, however, necessarily need to result in a reading that the book does not explain difference or believes it is 'trivial'.

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<sup>13</sup> This seems to be King's concept of the relative significance of 'sameness' and 'difference' as well since his conclusion is that an acceptable version of 'the classical paradigm' would be one in which it is considered as 'a regulatory formation aimed at containing moments of "excess" within Hollywood's own practices' (I, p 88).

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Now, ironically, King's reading not only wishes to believe that the book indicates that differences are non-pertinent but the reading's alternative history (which is being written in spite of – or because of – its denials<sup>14</sup>) attributes differences or excesses not to the system in interaction with human agents but, in a surprising move, ascribes it to 'which' functionary, with *what* professional, social and personal characteristics'. Continuing the passage quoted above, the review states, 'Naturally enough, it is possible to claim that such differences, not to mention less stable textual processes of "excess", are trivial. But then the task is to show this by exploring the range of difference as well as sameness' (I, p 79).

Now where our readings of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* might actually differ is not in the significance of needing to account for difference but in that account (e.g., our explanations of it). King never spells out his position (he has excluded from his method of criticising us presenting 'an alternate reading of the same evidence'). Consequently, the denial of resorting to theories of 'creativity' or auteurism but mentioning human differences in 'activating' practices and techniques is all that is offered. This reading might seem the start of a humanism, an instrumentalism, or a mechanistic structuralism. Moreover, the theory of 'activation' is neither a dialectic materialism nor does it have as much coherency and scope as one suggesting an internal tension within the logic of capitalism: e.g., standardisation and differentiation. Quite frankly, I would still prefer explaining difference as due to human agency, consciously, non-consciously and unconsciously responding to (and against) a dialectical economic system (e.g., capitalism) that privileges consumption of the disposable (see *CHC*, chapter 9, 'Standardization and Differentiation', pp 96-112, and two of the book's specific limit case studies – one, the subset of films labelled '*film noir*'; the other, the specific film *Citizen Kane*, chapters 7 and 27). For me, difference is not trivial, but it is explicable, even if it is not predictable.

The assertion by King's reading that the book's concern for 'sameness' prevails can only be substantiated, as in the other cases, through reading strategies that are, as he would describe them, symptomatic. Take his extension of this point through focusing on the notion of a 'factory' system in which he asserts, 'And if Hollywood is like Fords – Staiger does argue that this is not literally the case, but the differences are not sufficient on her account to overturn the homology – then the same imperative "to insure the most efficient and economical work arrangement" can be taken to govern the mass production of cars and films' (I, p 80, citing *CHC*, p 90). Now what differences does the book marshal to dispute the comparison? First, it introduces Marx's distinctions between serial manufacturing (which characterised production of Hollywood films) and machine-tool (or modern) industry (which characterised production of cars). The book notes that the former did allow for 'some collective activity and cooperation' among crafts people. The latter has become the archetype of alienation in capitalism. Yet this

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<sup>14</sup> Having taken a deconstruction position, the review should expect this.

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pointed claim as proof of difference between systems of production becomes in King's reading 'my "admission"' (I, p 80).

In addition, the text emphasised product differentiation as critical in marketing and, inversely, on the mode of production. No matter how little one film might be different from many other films, Hollywood publicised that variation. Indeed, advertising is as much a part of this period of capitalism as is mass production. As I note, 'Thus, difference and "improvement" in film practice was also necessary (for this reason filmmaking did not achieve the assembly-line uniformity prevalent in other industries)' (*CHC*, p 109). I continue: 'This tension [between standardization and product differentiation] results in two additional effects on the Hollywood style and production practices: the encouragement of the innovative worker and the cyclical innovation of styles and genres' (*CHC*, p 109). That is, which 'functionary' is involved is not irrelevant, although 'intentional agency' is regulated by the industry's norms. Furthermore, 'excess' should not be necessarily equated with class conflict but – just as plausibly – from a historical perspective, the worker accepting capitalism's logic and ideology, and from a psychoanalytical perspective, the worker functioning in a particular psychic economy which may (or may not) reinforce patriarchy.

If King's reading blinds itself to the conjunction 'and', inverts claims to 'admissions', and projects onto the book a theoretical expectation which it is unwilling to amend, then it is possible to produce a reading which attributes to the text a reduction of significance to difference. As another instance of this, the review suggests:

*This development [of the continuity script] occurred against a background of growing demands for quality in production – specifically: narrative dominance and clarity, verisimilitude, continuity, stars and spectacle ([CHC], p 96). Such demands, which at no point are considered in the light of their potential to clash or conflict. . . .* (I, p 80)

Such a conclusion can be reached if the reader skips passages regarding conflicts between norms of story coherence and causality and spectacle, stars and novelties (*CHC*, p 109), Bordwell's extended treatment of this via bogus happy endings (*CHC*, chapter 7), and the discussion of the problem of 'the balance between formula and showmanship' (*CHC*, pp 109-10).

Two other examples will round out this point. One is the review's refusal to read 'differentiation' in the discussion of film technology. After praising 'Bordwell and Thompson [for making] some substantial contributions to the history of film technology and practice', it continues: 'it would be noted that the conception of standardisation set in train by Staiger's contribution troubles these accounts at times' (I, p 83). In my theoretical and historical discussion of technological change, I offer three reasons for the industry considering potential technological



changes: 1) production efficiency, 2) product differentiation, and 3) adherence to standards of quality (*CHC*, pp 243-44), but I also suggest these reasons do not necessarily cohere and can at times be at odds.

*It is evident that these three causes for technological change can complement and collide with one another. Often, for instance, a change effected primarily for differentiating a product [so much for privileging 'sameness'] could be quite costly, particularly at the beginning.* (*CHC*, p 245)

In fact, this connects with King's intriguing version of Thompson's point about the criteria for camera technology. What he takes as 'basic' (I, p 83) for a regime of visual representation was not so naturalised at one point in the history of camera technology when cost was also considered. King writes: 'If the authors were concerned at this point with some *epochal* shift in the anthropology of visual representation, such observations might have, if taken further, some explanatory bite' (I, p 83). We should thank the reading for its help, but we thought we *were* interested in situating a specific social formation's choice of tools and techniques within *its* given epoch of ideological/signifying practices.

The other example is the review's thesis that Bordwell's analyses of the star and *film noir* fail as studies of (regulated) difference. This is because Bordwell's 'formulation seems to equate the potential for challenge with the intention to challenge and to confuse the effectivity of a practice with its origins' (I, p 85). This is an interesting criticism since two pages later King criticises Bordwell's definition of 'style' from the inverse approach: 'Ambiguously equating film with its plot and collaterally plot with style allows the authors to treat meaning as an effect, rather than a constitutive moment, of the discursive practices of film-making' (I, p 87). I suppose you could reconcile the disparities among these ideas if you assert, as the review seems to, that it is all right for 'meaning' to be 'constitutive' but not 'practices'. However, if 'origins' are not to be fallaciously confused with evaluating the effectivity of a practice (and they aren't), then I am still left to wonder how to fit in King's attribution of significance to '*which* functionary'. I don't know that it is possible to sort out all of this, particularly since King's review is not proposing an alternative history but examining the (in)coherency and gaps of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Consequently, the 'coherency' and 'completeness' of his subtext does not matter.

Actually, the question of 'difference' is *not just* its pertinence but also its *place* within the mode of production and the film practice. The economic system of capitalism and the practices of specific workers were to exploit innovations and 'difference' but also to recuperate that variation, playing with it, but then bringing it back into line within the dominant norms of story-telling or more specific generic conventions. The explanation for difference that I read the book as offering is an economic one although it may surprise King that I would also connect this to broad stretches of capitalist ideologies and to certain aspects of the uncon-

scious. Yet such a general causation has little pertinence as an explanatory model, and in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, I tried to provide theory and data at a more specific historical juncture – late nineteenth-century capitalism and, later, monopoly capitalism of the twentieth century in the United States in a mass-produced, discursive medium.

In conclusion, I would recall that King's 'challenge' was to be 'Not on grounds of alternative evidence or an alternative reading of the same evidence, but in terms of the coherence of the arguments presented and their relationship to arguments not presented'. In reviewing the sites of difference between our readings of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, I would argue that King does not show any incoherence in the book's argumentation. In fact, he finds it a very coherent project – albeit formalist. However, he does seem to indicate some 'arguments not presented'. Here he disagrees with what he takes to be the book's conclusions because the book does not adhere to his theoretical expectations regarding what might be relevant in what ways. Thus, the gaps he discovers for *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* are not technically 'structuring absences' as much as distances between his expectations for a history of Hollywood film and the book's arguments. The causes for the review's reading strategies may be bound up in these factors or they may be due to other reasons. At any rate, significant differences do exist between King's reading and mine of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Indeed, of course, it will be up to any 'future users' of the book to interpret it (and our readings of it) as suits them.

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# THESIS ELEVEN

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# ADVENTURES IN THE HIGHLANDS OF THEORY

BY DAVID BORDWELL

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<sup>1</sup> Note to non-US readers: WPA: the Work Projects Administration, founded in 1935 by Franklin Roosevelt, mobilised unemployed workers in many fields, ranging from building construction to the arts. It went out of existence in 1943.

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<sup>2</sup> For ease of reference, I shall cite King's essays as follows: 'I' refers to part one, "'The Classical Hollywood Cinema'", *Screen* November-December 1986, vol 27 no 6, pp 74-88. 'II' refers to part two, 'The Story Continues . . .', *Screen*, Summer 1987, vol 28 no 3, pp 56-82. Page references will be given in the text.

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<sup>3</sup> Note to non-US readers: The badger is the state animal of Wisconsin. Every state in the US has by common custom its own animal, bird, flower, song, etc. For readers of *Screen*, the most pertinent analogy may be to the chapters of *Ulysses*.

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BARRY KING HAS revealed a hotbed of film research operating in the American Middle West. For the first time in public he has divulged our name – the Wisconsin Project (derived from a never-completed WPA dam<sup>1</sup>). More important, he has unmasked our *junta*'s relentless single-mindedness. 'The fundamental thrust of the Wisconsin project is to establish how readers accomplish the identification of the cinematic image' (II, 81).<sup>2</sup> When we founded the Project, we swore an oath in badger's blood<sup>3</sup> not to work on any intellectual problems but the one King has identified; and this oath was cast, believe it or not, in exactly his words. Admittedly, it is not clear what this sentence means. But whatever it means, it is our fundamental thrust. And we thought we had covered our tracks pretty well. Note how subtly we establish how readers accomplish the identification of the cinematic image etc, in, say, Staiger's study of early screen-writing practices, or Thompson's book-length arguments about how Hollywood film distribution gained international hegemony, or my study of Japanese film history, or even Branigan's account of sound in *The Purple Plain*.<sup>4</sup> The Project must now reckon with the awareness that all forthcoming work – Staiger's historical study of reception, Thompson's book of film analyses and her study of P G Wodehouse, Branigan's further investigations into narrative, and my analyses of Ozu and of the conventions of film criticism – will be read as fundamentally thrusting in the manner indicated.

Fortunately, however, King is far from fully disclosing our Fantômas-like operations. His investigation is marred throughout by howlers, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, obscurities and invalid inferences. In fact, incredible as it sounds, I can find nothing pertaining to my contributions that he gets right. In what follows I point out some major inadequacies of his account: his indifference to evidence (part 1), his misrepresentation of the texts and their theoretical underpinnings (2), his misunderstanding of how research-based arguments work (3), his

faulty reasoning (4), his counterarguments (5), and his rhetorical misjudgments (6). I conclude with some observations on the larger implications of his enterprise, at least as they look from the Wisconsin underground.

# I.

On some key matters King reveals himself ill-equipped to judge the books under review. He displays no competence to evaluate any of the hundreds of empirical claims made in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*<sup>5</sup> (hereafter *CHC*), *Narration in the Fiction Film*<sup>6</sup> (*NiFF*) or *Point of View in the Cinema* (*POV*). For all one can tell, King has never seen any films at all; or read any trade papers or technical journals, or indeed read very much theory outside the *Screen* approved list. (There are a few deviations, on which I shall comment at the end.) He mentions one film, *Pickpocket*, but I cannot tell whether he has seen it, since he criticises my analysis by means of a quotation from, of all people, Robert Bresson.

True, King has an inkling that the *CHC* resembles Barry Salt's book on style and technology. He will not, however, compare the two works, since that is a mere exercise for 'the exegete' (I, p 75)<sup>7</sup>, and King is no exegete, as you shall see. The value of such tasks, and indeed of first-hand research of any sort, is dismissed in inimitable Kingspeak: 'It is to be hoped, and this is hardly a matter of doubt, that evidentially based assessments will follow in due course; indeed there is enough in *CHC* alone to occupy a platoon of theses' (I, p 75). In other words: other people will do the dirty work; I'll take the high road of Theory.

Before we follow him on his climb, we ought to note that if you accept King at his word here, he cannot judge any of our evidence. How, then, can he assert that *CHC*'s history of film technology 'makes some substantial contributions' (I, p 83)? His only authority on such matters, Barry Salt, would certainly not agree.<sup>8</sup> The real impulse behind this compliment is perhaps revealed in another sentence: 'It seems likely that these findings . . . will withstand critique' (I, p 83). This is only a bet – what Jonathan Rée describes as 'watching the ways in which the currents of opinion are flowing, a kind of punting on what future authorities will say'<sup>9</sup>.

King's single passage through the land of data involves his discussion of the size of the 'unbiased sample' in *CHC*. He is distressed that the authors 'did not attempt to balance the proportions of films coming from each of the Big Five and Little Three, let alone other sources of product' (I, p 84). Of course, the point of our *unbiased* sample is exactly not to weight the selection by such *a priori* decisions. How a proper weighting might have been done King does not say. On what grounds would he determine how many films should represent Goldwyn or PRC? Despite the resources King claims to exist in the US, he will find it nearly impossible to see even obscure Paramount films, let alone a

<sup>4</sup> Janet Staiger, 'Mass-Produced Photoplays: Economic and Signifying Practices in the First Years of Hollywood', *Wide Angle* vol 4 no 3, 1980, pp 12-27; Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market*, London, British Film Institute, 1985; David Bordwell, 'Our Dream-Cinema: Western Historiography of the Japanese Film', *Film Reader* 4, 1979, pp 45-62; Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Berlin, Mouton, 1984, pp 96-97.

<sup>5</sup> David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, London, Methuen, University Paperback, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> As insatiable exegetes, Thompson and I have discussed both theoretical and empirical aspects of Salt's important book in 'Toward a Scientific Film History?', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* vol 10 no 3, Summer 1985, pp 224-237.

<sup>8</sup> See our protracted exchange with Salt in *Film Quarterly*: 'A Salt and Battery', *Film Quarterly* vol 40 no 2, Winter 1986-87, pp

59-62; 'Reply to Bordwell and Thompson', *Film Quarterly* vol 40 no 4, Summer 1987, pp 59-61; 'Salt II', *Film Quarterly* vol 40 no 4, Summer 1987, pp 61-63.

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Rée, 'Marxist Modes', Roy Edgley and Richard Osborne (eds), *Radical Philosophy Reader*, London, Verso, 1985, p 357.

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minor Republic film from the late 1940s. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that despite the problem of film availability (which we discuss on pp 388-389), we have been more scrupulous and explicit about our selection procedure and data base than any previous researchers. King warns that 'the claims for the unbiased sample should be treated with caution, not least because of the relatively small numbers involved' (I, p 84). Proportionately, one would have to treat with utter scepticism those claims of other writers, from Kuntzel to Heath, who generalise about the classical system on the basis of a *single* film. Writers like Bellour, who relies on a few Hitchcock films and a couple of others, would gain only fractionally more credence. Yet I have not noticed King issuing a similar caution about the studios, periods, etc, not represented in these writers' selection procedures. Even Barry Salt, who claims to be using a large and representative sample, has never published his data base, so the exegete whom King assigns to Salt's book could not analyse his corpus as King has ours. He is able to doubt our results because we have spelled out the steps leading up to them; indeed, his very numbers derive from our breakdown (*CHC*, p 388).

On the whole, however, King avoids empirical data – so assiduously that he declines to cite texts accurately. In two spots, he drops a 'the' from the original passage (II, pp 56 and 64). The missing signifier slides to another quotation and gets added to my text. For good measure, King changes all my later 'a's into 'the's (II, pp 59-60). A quotation said to be from page 22 of *NiFF* is actually on page 23, while one attributed to page 32 is on page 30 (II, p 59, and II, p 67). His citation of Mieke Bal's *Narratology* seems to be inaccurate as well (II, p 68). And he attributes a quotation to page xii of *CHC*, but this page is blank (I, p 76). Is he here hinting at the emptiness yawning behind all signification?

Taking literally the premise that the sign is arbitrary, King proceeds to revise my work. Where I had written that narrative is 'the activity of selecting, arranging, and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on the perceiver' (*NiFF*, p xi), he substitutes 'ordering' for 'rendering' and 'create' for 'achieve' (II, p 57). Again, I wrote, 'The same piece of information might have been conveyed many other ways, many of them requiring no sight or sound of Jeff at all' (*NiFF*, p 49). King substitutes 'in' for the first 'many', and then eliminates the last clause without marking the ellision (II, p 69). (Since the original sentences are pretty awkward, I'd like to think he made the changes out of solicitude; but, considering his own handling of language, he is unlikely to have had improvement in mind.) Lopping off the tail end of sentences is one of King's most common editorial devices: when he quotes our aims in the *CHC* (xiv), he leaves out of the list our reference to 'the activities of the spectator' (I, p 76). King's painstaking attention to such matters may be gauged by the fact that of eleven indented quotations from *Narration in the Fiction Film*, he has altered the wording, punctuation, or attribution of four. True, he does not signal

these differences explicitly, but he knows how the Project likes to find such minutiae. We have assigned a platoon of theses to look for more.

## II.

Carelessness and lack of familiarity with the data do not check King's stride; he is bound for the high country of Theory, and scholarly competence is too heavy to take along. So let us consider how King fares in presenting ideas.

He starts with the disadvantage of not knowing the theories at stake. Although he claims that Thompson's and my arguments issue from Russian Formalism, King betrays no acquaintance with primary Formalist texts, relying instead on Tony Bennett's *New Accents* crib and Fredric Jameson's account. Both expositions were never particularly sound, and they are now outdated. From Jameson, King derives the notion that cinema is well-suited for the *fabula/syuzhet* distinction because 'film as a medium constitutes a material separation of form and content, the *fabula* being always given in advance of its technical embodiment' (I, p 82). Whatever this means (is the *fabula* the profilmic event? the script? 'reality?'), it is wrong. Thompson and I explicitly deny any such formulation. (More on *fabula/syuzhet* later.) King summarises our views with his usual fluency:

*A formalist position leads to a decisive emphasis on defining the specificity of a given medium as a means of signification; especially as a means of narration, with techniques and their characteristic deployment being taken as the markers of the intrinsicality – the literariness or in Thompson's neologism the 'cinematicness' – of the medium or media format. (I, p 82)*

In so far as this makes any sense, it is a complete distortion of our views. Formalism has no inherent bias toward signification (Formalism is not semiotics); it grants no special emphasis to narration; and techniques and their patterning do not necessarily mark the specificity of the medium (if that's what 'intrinsicality' refers to). Anyone familiar with the writings of the Russian Formalists and the Prague Structuralists (I have to emphasise this, since King always ignores the extent to which Thompson and I rely on them) will recognise King's capsule statement as gibberish. To take only one example: The Formalists are not especially interested in defining a medium, say language; they are interested in describing a *function*, 'literariness', which is manifested in certain properties and uses of language. Similarly, we are not interested in *defining* the medium of cinema. We are interested in analysing and explaining historical conventions and functions. A description, analysis, or explanation, of narration or anything else, is not a definition. (As we shall see, King's critique depends extensively on confusing these concepts.)

King even more disastrously misunderstands the other major theoretical influence on *NiFF*, contemporary cognitive theory. He barely discusses this aspect of the book, apparently because he hasn't the foggiest idea what I'm talking about. He summarises it (and, inevitably, the Project *in toto*) as 'information theory goes to the movies' (II, p 82). Since Thompson's discussion of camera technology and Staiger's of the continuity script do not seem deeply indebted to information theory, a footnote adds defensively, 'the comparison with information theory is not so far-fetched, given that Bordwell and Branigan, especially, use terminology and references within the field' (II, p 27). The problem is that we don't. If we were interested in information theory, you would find us discussing the ideas of Shannon and Weaver, Wiener, Cherry, Miller, Malmberg, Bateson, *et al.* Instead you find me referring to Anderson, Bruner, Fodor, Hochberg, Gregory, Neisser, Rock, *et al.* These are psychologists, not cyberneticians; they study perception and cognition, and if they refer to 'information processing', it is not at all in the sense that 'communication engineers' refer to 'information'. Apparently attaching footnotes and a bibliography to a book is of no avail, so I will simply mention that King will find a straightforward popular survey in Howard Gardner's *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution* (New York, Basic Books, 1987).<sup>10</sup> It reads as smoothly as a New Accents volume, but it differs in being much longer than 200 pages and in making extended, nuanced arguments.

Undaunted by unfamiliarity with the pertinent theoretical frames of reference, King goes on to misrepresent the texts he reviews. Let's start with his notion of my notion of narrative. He claims that *CHC* reduces narrative to 'narrative logic', or causality (I, p 88); but I insist that narrative logic includes parallelism as well as causality, and it needs to be represented in space and time too; all these are 'narrative'. (See *CHC*, pp 6-69.) He says I take narrative as simply a process of 'selection' (II, p 57), for which there is no warrant in my writing. In *NiFF* I do not say that a poetics of narration will 'lead directly' to an account of narrative activity in fictional cinema and then to a historical poetics (II, p 57); I say that the former 'may encourage' the latter (*NiFF*, p 336). The distinction among narrative representation, narrative structure and narration is not 'the metaphysical ground, in the Derridean sense' of my study of narration (II, p 57); it is only a set of enabling initial distinctions, entailing no metaphysical commitments. My point is borne out by another of his misrepresentations, that my analysis of narration 'tends to equate narration with the total order of the text minus destabilising moments of excess' (II, p 75). Had he been attentive to the first page of *NiFF*, he would have noticed that narrative representation and narrative structure also contribute (non-metaphysically) to the 'total order of the text'. King also claims that there is no possibility of change in *CHC*'s tri-level model of a narrative film; but the model was devised exactly to explain change at all three levels; we explain how the model could do this (*CHC*, p 7), and the rest of the book seeks to prove it. (Maybe it fails to do so, but King

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<sup>10</sup> To forestall counterattacks, let me say that I do not subscribe to everything in Gardner's excellent book; but then only dogmatists would expect me to. And lest King thinks that by citing an American cognitive theorist I pooh-pooh the British as backward, I happily refer to the important work of Richard Gregory, e.g., *Mind in Science*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, especially Chapters 9-13 and P N Johnson-Laird, *Mental Models*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983. See also Guy Claxton (ed), *Cognitive Psychology: New Directions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980 and Peter Lloyd *et al.*, *Introduction to Psychology: An Integrated Approach*, London, Fontana, 1984, especially Chapters 4-6, 9-11.

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doesn't show *that*, since it would require some empirical investigation.) He says that *CHC* avoids discussing how form can 'act as an alibi' for specific social and ideological patterns; but pages 82-83 and 367-377 discuss how classical narrative devices can be and have been related to just such patterns.

Speaking of *CHC*, King persists in characterising it as proposing a model haunted by Hegelian idealism. It calls forth his most dazzling flights, but compare what he says with what we say:

King: The model has 'a ubiquity and a capacity for transcendence' (I, p 88).

*CHC*: 'The system cannot determine every minute detail of the work, but it isolates preferred practices and sets limits upon invention' (p 4).

King: The model is 'a reified absolute... logos of an expressive totality' (I, p 88).

*CHC*: 'My account here will construct the classical stylistic paradigm across several decades, emphasizing the continuity at the second and third levels. But by stressing continuity of function I do not imply that the systems' paradigmatic range did not change somewhat' (p 7).

King: The model is 'a seamless entity, devoid of internal contradiction' (I, p 88).

*CHC*: 'In Hollywood cinema, a specific sort of narrative causality operates as the dominant, making temporal and spatial systems vehicles for it. These systems do not always rest quietly under the sway of narrative logic...' (p 12). 'I have already suggested that compositional, generic, and realistic motivation do not always work in perfect unison, and I shall examine some typical dissonances in Chapter 7' (p 21). 'Narration can, however momentarily, break down the unity of the classical film' (p 83).

King: The model is 'an ontological constant which exhaustively defines the studio-produced film' (I, p 88).

*CHC*: 'No Hollywood film is the classical system; each is an "unstable equilibrium" of classical norms' (p 5).

The effect, he says, is to treat stylistic innovations as 'minor recalibrations' of a system that remains constant in its 'formal relationships' (I, p 87n); but approximately half the book is devoted to these innovations, which yield such minor changes as the soft style of silent cinematography, talking pictures, Technicolor and deep-focus cinematography. Each of these is discussed as not only performing canonised functions but also extending those 'formal relationships' that King claims we reify.

The reader may have noted that many of the claims that King misreports occur quite early in the book, which does lead one to wonder how far he got into the text. The same musings strike me with respect to *NiFF*. He says I treat classical narration as 'a tightly controlled movement from initial state to disturbance to restabilisation' (II, p 66). But I don't say that; *Screen* says that, and has been saying it for over a decade.

Here is what I say, for instance, about the ending: 'There are enough instances of unmotivated plot resolutions to suggest a second hypothesis: that the classical ending is not all that structurally decisive, being a more or less arbitrary readjustment of that world knocked awry in the previous eighty minutes' (*NiFF*, p 159). I go on for almost a full page about 'pseudoclosure', which you might think would attract someone so interested in gaps, contradictions, fissures, seams, instabilities and other signs of damaged goods; but King has somehow missed it. (It's in *CHC* too, on pp 82-83.)

More blatantly, his characterisation of the narrational modes I outline (another half a book that has apparently gone undigested) bears virtually no relation to what I wrote. For example, he offers a ludicrously inaccurate summary of what I say about Soviet films of the 1920s and 1930s, claiming that they're about 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' and that they ask the spectator to make 'deductive' connections (II, p 66)! His summary of the difference between 'sparse' and 'replete' parametric narration is hopelessly muddled. Asking how one can distinguish the two, King answers for me: "Replete" narration tends to foreground stylistic events in a manner that "creates deviations in the film" (II, p 62). But if you look at the passage he is quoting, you find that I say: 'Establishing a distinctive intrinsic norm, *either sparse or replete*, may create deviations within the film' (*NiFF*, p 285; italics for emphasis here).

King also misrepresents my theory of spectatorial activity. He says that I characterise that activity as 'hypothetico-deductive' (II, p 62); I do not. In fact, it is plainly inductive, although it does use hypotheses. (Again, knowledge of the cognitive-theory literature would have saved King from a gaffe.) King says again and again that I offer a theory of 'reading'; but I explicitly say (p 30) that what I offer is not commensurate with the 'reading' model. (He disagrees, and I shall rebut him shortly; but he at least ought not to load me up with conceptual baggage I've deliberately jettisoned.) He says that in discussing parametric narration I counterpose 'an "expert" reading to a "lay" reading in a manner which conceives of the latter commonsense or thematic reading as an error' (II, pp 74-75). On the contrary: the experts – critics like King – are the ones who cite Bresson as a clue to what a movie is about and who produce the thematic readings I argue against.

On the same point, he says that I should offer a 'realist' reading 'which explains the "surfaces" of the lay reading as a result of underlying textual mechanisms' (II, p 75). The audacity of this charge takes my breath away (briefly). The entire second half of *NiFF* aims to offer just such explanations, as in the chapter on art cinema (upon which King does not comment), where I suggest that 'the art-film narration solicits not only denotative comprehension but connotative reading, a higher-level interpretation' and go on to suggest how all the narrational processes I indicate invite interpretation (p 212). In a chapter he *has* purportedly read, I spend two pages showing how parametric narration in *Pickpocket* pro-

duces just the sort of mystical ambiguity that King relishes, concluding: 'The sense of an order whose finest grain we can glimpse but not grasp helps produce the connotative effects of which thematic criticism records the trace' (p 306). Had he read these passages, King might not have later grieved at my lack of 'a realist epistemology' (II, p 80).

You can find lots more instances of misrepresentation. I am amazed that *NiFF*, so full of stills, diagrams, and minute descriptions of style (including an attempt to analyse a single shot of a Jancsó film) can be described as a book which 'underestimates, or more exactly analytically sets aside, questions of the materiality of the text' (II, p 80).<sup>11</sup> Nor does the book 'reduce . . . the detective film to the dramaturgical premise "suspense"' (II, p 70); if King will look at page 64, he will find a detailed account of the characteristic detective-tale *syuzhet*; he will also find that I emphasise the role of curiosity as much as that of suspense. Further, Branigan's discussion of hypothesis/error accounts of narration does not 'match' my discussion of enunciation and suture (II, pp 80-81); the comparison is 'clear enough' to King, but to no one else: they are both critiques, but of different positions. King also claims that Thompson and I take an approach 'which abandons the question of meaning altogether' (I, p 82); a glance at *Film Art: An Introduction* (pp 30-33 and elsewhere in the 1985 edition<sup>12</sup>), or at any page of *NiFF* will refute this ludicrous assertion. Finally, in *CHC* we explicitly say (pp 10, 388) that we don't have what King calls 'a completely random selection procedure' (p 86).

Sometimes the Project just falls victim to his writing style. He says I say that 'Film narration is composed of two distinct theoretical strands' (II, p 58). No: I say that there are two theoretical traditions which seek to explain narration, which is a very different thing. He says I say that in parametric narration 'Stylistic figuration must not rupture the hold of narrativity' (II, p 72). Whatever that means, I am sure that it is wrong, and I know that I did not say it. And nowhere does anyone consider *CHC* the 'culmination' and 'central text' of the Wisconsin Project (I, p 75); this is merely the puffery of a reviewer struggling to hold the reader's attention.

At other times, King distorts by omission. One could argue that he makes *CHC* a more 'theoretical' book than it is by disregarding most of the historical material. In reviewing *NiFF*, King omits not only the discussion of the films (save *Pickpocket*) but most of the basic narrational properties I set out (knowledgeability, self-consciousness, communicativeness), the concepts of prominence and foregrounding, the arguments about temporal and spatial representation in cinema, and other significant matters. By ignoring my distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic norms, King can naively suggest that maybe what we need is an account of 'a particular competence set up by the text itself' (II, p 80). The concept of intrinsic norms aims to explain just such a skill, and if my individual analyses speak to any point, it is exactly to this one. *Screen* has surely changed if its reviewer has nothing to say about my discussion of Godard's work, and I would have thought that my discussion of

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<sup>11</sup> King might reply that he has a loftier materiality in mind, that of 'culturally given materiality' (II, p 81), a fine phrase which is never afforded the luxury of a definition.

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<sup>12</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1985.

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perspective as a representational scheme would have elicited at least a mild wowl of protest.

### III.

*He worshipped general ideas and did so with pedantic aplomb. The generality was godly, the specific diabolical.* — Nabokov, *Pale Fire*

Perhaps King misrepresents these books in such detail because he misunderstands their, so to speak, fundamental thrust. He insists on grafting his ideas onto us: form/content, ‘reading’, the position of the subject. It does no good to argue explicitly against the adequacy of such notions, since he either misunderstands the arguments or just ignores them and continues to saddle us with views we don’t hold. At a deeper level, though, his eviction of the empirical has a lot to do with his inability to get inside our arguments. Since this is a point which touches on styles of theoretical argument more generally, I shall expand on it a little.

In relegating ‘evidentially based assessments’ to others, King thinks he is doing something rather simple: just looking at ‘the coherence of the arguments presented and their relationship to arguments not presented’ (I, p 75). Leaving aside his botching of the arguments, this assertion and King’s subsequent discussion assume that the ‘evidence’ is all one kind of thing. (Presumably it consists of those claims having descriptive purport or flagged with footnotes.) This allows King to flatten all claims to the same level of abstraction: the juggling of terms and concepts. But in historical or critical/analytical work, the evidence is ingredient to the texture of the arguments. Consider the levels of claims in an argument like this, which I schematise for the sake of demonstration:

- (a) Capitalism strives to control technological innovation.
- (b) As a capitalist industry, the Hollywood studio system sought to regulate technological innovation.
- (c) To ensure stylistic and economic stability, the classical system sought to innovate technology in a controlled fashion.
- (d) Such regulation was carried out through particular agencies, which used both discourses and practices to achieve their members’ ends.
- (e) The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Society of Motion Picture Engineers, and the American Society of Cinematographers were crucial agencies in technological regulation.
- (f) Each agency had more specific or intrinsic economic/stylistic/professional-ideological projects, and within and among these agencies incompatible strategies might emerge.
- (g) Such projects can be inferred from the discourses and practices of the agencies if we assume that the groups sought to regulate technology and maximise their members’ benefits.

- (h) Gregg Toland's career bears the traces of the ASC's contradictory injunctions to the cinematographer.
- (i) *Citizen Kane* can be seen as a problematic consequence of Toland's professional situation and of the wider forces at play in Hollywood cinematography.
- (j) *Citizen Kane* was released in 1941, amidst a string of other 'deep-focus' films.
- (k) *Citizen Kane*'s use of deep-focus was believed by many cinematographers to be excessive, but because of professional imperatives and Toland's celebrity, a modified deep-focus style came into common usage in the 1940s.

Which steps in this argument are merely 'evidentiary' and which involve only 'coherence'? There is not a single proposition without empirical import and not a single proposition without conceptual consequences. To assess this argument at all, you must weigh both inferential adequacy and empirical claims at every step. Of course in making such an argument, the writer runs great risk, since s/he may slip at any point; and in anatomising my argument here, I lay myself open to rebuttal on any of the propositions advanced. But that is what historical and critical/analytical argument is all about. Since King never tries to get at the fine grain of an argument this way, it is no wonder that he has only this to say about the case in point: 'See David Bordwell's discussion of Gregg Toland and deep focus, p 345ff, which manages to attribute both great and little effect to Toland's innovations' (I, p 87n). *CHC*, *NiFF*, and *POV* are full of such arguments as this, and whether they're adequate or not, one cannot assess them by simply hiving off something called evidence.

King's tactic is, however, characteristic of theoretical arguments nowadays. The trend is well described by Richard Johnson:

*The object is to show that a text is organised around a specific problematic. Certain problematics are held to be fundamentally flawed. If such a tendency is present – especially Althusser's own trio of historicism, humanism or empiricism – it is held to exhaust the whole content of the text. The text falls. The procedure is a kind of intellectual lumber-jacking, very exhilarating, especially when the target is some great big classical tree that has stood in the forest for many years. Down goes Weber! Down go the Marxist historians! Down goes Marx! . . . But this mode of critique is almost wholly destructive and therefore non-accumulative: it 'problematises' but rarely provides another substantive account, still less one that incorporates what was rational in the first. It tends to produce a search for 'originality.' It differs very much in these respects from more creative modes, of which Marx's treatment of political economy might stand as a model.<sup>13</sup>*

All these consequences – the absence of a substantive alternative account, the inability to grapple with the specifics of the position under

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Johnson, 'Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology: Notes on an Impasse', in *Ideology and Cultural Production*, Michele Barrett et al (eds), New York, St Martin's 1979, p 55.

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consideration and the search for originality – are evident in King’s critique as well.

King misunderstands our research initiatives in another way. For all his loyalty to Theory, he does not see that we pursue answers to questions. To pose particular questions and subquestions not only focuses one’s energies; it commits one to as detailed and discriminating a set of answers as one’s questions and purposes demand. It also means *not* asking other questions. Those questions may be just as important or interesting, but the researcher cannot answer all questions at once. Yet because one cannot, it is easy for a reviewer to raise lots of questions that a book does not ask, let alone answer. Consider King’s big complaint, so predictable that I could have paid him in advance to make it. What about ideology? he asks time and again. I frankly don’t know how to connect ideology, conceived in some non-vacuous way, with all the aspects of film history I have examined (at least not while achieving the density of texture which a historical or critical/analytical argument needs). If King thinks that every piece of research must answer questions about ideology, or subject positioning, or sexual difference (and what incidentally, would those questions be? Would everyone pose them in the same way?) then I guarantee that King will not like a lot of what I write: but I did not frame my questions in those terms. But King professes curiosity about such questions, so let him stir from the armchair. I invite King to show, *with arguments at least as detailed as that sketched above*, how any of my claims or evidence could answer a precisely posed question about ideology. He might warm up on this trifling problem:

*This trend of analysis probably accounts for what many may regard as the most extraordinary feature of the text, that its treatment of the role of ideology within the occupational confines of the film-making community (Hollywood) is confined to an examination of various ‘recipe’ texts, technical specifications and the like, that debate or prescribe how to deliver or render a narrative, an image, without exhibiting a great deal of curiosity about the social or political values of what is rendered (I, p 87).*

King’s astonishment that we don’t tackle this issue suggests that we really missed a chance here. Assuming that the foregoing could be recast as a research question, I eagerly await King’s answer.

King’s obliviousness to the problem-solving thrust of research shows up in another way. Many of the differences he claims to find between my contributions to *CHC* and my *NiFF* spring simply from the fact that the two books ask different questions. The former seeks to describe, analyse and explain how a particular group style emerged, functioned and changed. The concept of narration takes a place as one component in the overall answer. *NiFF* asks what the process of narration in general entails and how one can construct a critically and historically informative analysis of that process, especially in so far as it affects textual composition and spectatorial activity. These are related, but different,

questions, and it is not surprising that the conceptual scheme shifts between the projects. King believes that you have one set of ideas you just apply to every problem that comes along. By contrast, one can see intellectual inquiry not only as involving change and self-criticism (King might note that I signal rethinkings of problems from my earlier work, a habit not conspicuously developed in the film theorists whom he valorises), but also as involving a flexibility in recasting concepts to handle a problem at hand. King claims that an 'extended' definition of style ruled *CHC* and that a narrower ('reductive') conception is at work in *NiFF*. Now we shall see farther along that this is not the case. What I want to point out here is that because the concepts are used differently, King thinks that the treatment is 'ambiguous' (II, p 63). He can profess confusion at my confusion: 'This is not even to debate the question of whether Classical Narration is a term that is conceptually congruent with Classical Style, mode of film practice with narrational mode, and so on' (II, p 64). I don't know what 'conceptually congruent' means, but if it means 'identical', the answer is plainly no, and if it means 'consistent', the answer is plainly yes. The concepts have been constructed to answer different questions and should be considered in that light.

By flattening out the arguments and ignoring the questions that inform them, King tries to make the works under review seem like Grand Theory. For King, and perhaps others in the lumber-jacking trade, intellectual work consists of accepting a doctrine and then letting that generate a project. Whence the tendency to think that if the doctrine seems problematic, the conclusions can be dismissed. But for me at least, research begins with puzzles that I think worth solving, questions that others have not asked or have not answered to my satisfaction. *This is not to say that I have no presuppositions or frame of reference.* It is only to say that those presuppositions do not constitute a theory in any doctrinal sense. In asking questions, one can frame them so that they not only interrogate data but also reflexively test the adequacy of one's presuppositions. (This is why, incidentally, Russian Formalism seems to me a good model: quite apart from its substantive insights, it refused to establish itself as Grand Theory.) King thinks that if one is out of sympathy with, say, the Slavic Formalist tradition, one will not accept our conclusions. This may be an accurate sociological observation, but it is not logical. If research is not a simple mapping of received concepts onto obliging evidence, then one should strive for *an argument to the best explanation*. You may disagree with Formalism as a 'theory', but if you recognise that the arguments address a significant problem, you, or somebody, needs to find a non-Formalist solution. For King in his tipster mode an argument passes muster if it is likely to 'withstand critique'; but since any argument can be criticised, this formulation cannot distinguish the grounds on which criticism can be withstood. The issue is whether an argument is stronger *than currently available candidates*. This is largely what 'argument to the best explanation' means. A powerful argument

<sup>14</sup> On Hollywood, see Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry*, New York, Oxford, 1980; Janet Wasko, *Movies and Money: Financing the American Film Industry*, Norwood, New Jersey, Ablex, 1982; Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus*, Metuchen, New Jersey, Scarecrow, 1983; Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985. On narration, see Jean-Paul Simon, *Le Filmique et le Comique*, Paris, Albatros, 1979; 'Enonciation et cinéma', *Communications* no 38, 1983; Roberto Campari, *Il Racconto del Film: Generi, Personaggi, Immagini*, Rome, Laterza, 1983; 'Cinéarrable', *Hors cadre* no 2, Spring 1984; Michel Colin, *Langue, Film, Discours: Prolegomènes à une Sémiologie Générative du Film*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1985; Francesco Casetti, *Dentro lo Sguardo: Il Film e il suo Spettatore*, Milan: Bompiani, 1986; George M Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> Take, as an example, King's blithe reference to the 'Big Five' and the 'Little Three' (I, p 94), as if these concepts did not emerge from work outside the *Screen* tradition, mostly that of Tino Balio and

challenges the reader to come up with another argument that answers the same questions at least as well.

Of course one could argue that some questions are, on intrinsic or instrumental grounds, more important or valuable than others. For example, King or the multitudes he claims to speak for ('many may regard as the most extraordinary feature . . .') could simply refuse to consider any questions that don't address ideology. Fair enough. If my questions mainly don't, why waste time reading my work? It cannot just be the topics discussed. Many scholarly books on Hollywood or narration, some of them much more attentive to ideology, have been published in recent years, and King ignores them. (So has *Screen*.<sup>14</sup>) So if we're not asking the right questions, why pay any attention to our answers?

I think the cause goes back, again, to the idea that empirical data can be extruded out of arguments. What the books under review produce, at one level, is a fairly large set of concepts and information concerning cinema. If one could only, using the *correct* theory and asking the *important* questions, incorporate this new material, one could have a better doctrine, or at least an up-to-date one. This is a recurring error in contemporary theory, running back at least to Comolli's belief that he could simply pluck out Sadoul's and Mitry's data and reinterpret them in a materialist light. To be consistent, the materialist researcher should hold that the theorist's conceptual frame of reference at least filters what concepts and data are selected and perhaps even governs what concepts and data are recognisable.<sup>15</sup>

King, leaving data drudgery to that platoon of theses, has no taste for working all this out. But, in my favourite passage, he does suggest the general conditions of the assimilation. If, he hints darkly,

*the authors are prepared to see the classical paradigm as a regulatory formation aimed at containing moments of 'excess' within Hollywood's own practices, achieving only moments of unstable equilibrium, then most – but not all – of what is problematic in their account can be reconciled* (I, p 88).

It is kind of him to allow us to pledge allegiance to his doctrine (even if he forgets that he lifts the 'unstable equilibrium' phrase from our own account (*CHC*, p 5). If only we had said this ourselves, and paid obeisance to the theory of the subject in a paragraph or two, we would 'withstand critique', or at least almost.

#### IV.

For someone purporting to work in theory, King commits some remarkable inferential misdemeanours. There are, first, the logical contradictions in his piece. King (inaccurately) claims, for instance, that *NiFF* holds that 'all telling in film finally resolves into showing' (II, p 62). This attests to my eviction of a discourse-based account of narra-



tion. Yet a few pages later, I am charged, along with co-conspirator Branigan, of harbouring a tendency 'to read cinema from a linguistic perspective' (II, p 81).

Here is a more striking example. At the end of part 1, in the for-your-own-good warning quoted at the close of the last section, King seems to hold out hope that the Project might be taken into the Theory fold. But at the beginning of part 2, he is unequivocal: 'Since my task is assessment, I can only gesture towards the radical incompatibility of this project with these other discursive practices' – i.e., 'deconstruction, Lacanian feminism, and postmodernism' (II, p 56). Near the end of part 2, he finds a glimmer of hope in Branigan's work: although Branigan may be 'complicit' (more on this adjective later), nevertheless 'those who wish to argue for the potential challenge of so-called non-representational signs (sound, colour, music) to a patriarchally structured subject, will find Branigan's delineation of the limits of subjectivity in film useful' (II, p 75). Now if we assume that the aforementioned deconstructionists, feminists and postmodernists are interested in challenges to a patriarchally structured subject, then Branigan's work is no longer radically incompatible. Or perhaps 'radically incompatible' just means 'different'. For as part II closes, we find the much meeker claim that 'like it or not' (I for one like it) the Project has produced 'an alternative paradigm' (II, p 82) – which hardly amounts to radical incompatibility.

When King attempts conceptual analysis the results are yet more unedifying. For example, when I argue that the star and *film noir* pose no inherent challenge to textual stability, King produces this: 'Such a formulation seems to equate the potential for challenge with the intention to challenge and to confuse the effectivity of a practice with its origins' (I, p 85). This is sheer bluster. The origins of the star system or the intentions behind *film noir* are beside the point; I argue that *the films themselves* do not overturn the system. If this is not addressing 'the potential for challenge' and 'effectivity', what is? King asks of Thompson's criteria for technological innovation 'what regime of visual representation would not require these qualities [i.e., control, durability, portability, etc] as *basic*' (I, p 83). He does not understand that only by differentiating these criteria can we discriminate the very incompatibilities and tensions that he thinks we don't look for. (See Thompson's reply on this point.) Moreover, 'basic' is equivocal, and is not clarified by being put in italics. Does King mean 'necessary'? Obviously not, since many existing cameras have not offered much control, did not yield particularly clear or steady images, etc. Edison got along very well for a long time with a camera which was not portable. But now we have strayed from the heights of Theory down to the foothills of evidence, where King will not follow.

King's ignorance of the pertinent theoretical literature cooperates with a striking inability to pursue an inferential chain. For instance, he claims that I lack a realist epistemology (II, p 80). (Is this the first time a *Screen* writer has considered this a deficiency?) But it is a straw man,

since the psychology which I propose is perfectly compatible with a realist epistemology. The Constructivist could argue that we construct inferences about the world in such a fashion that we gain knowledge about its underlying mechanisms. King tries to cast the charge in other terms: I have an excessively 'conventionalist' epistemology (II, p 70). But he is wrong again. A Constructivist psychology could argue that our construction of perceptual reality is not conventional, in the sense that all people in all societies automatically draw perceptual inferences in the same way. The difficulties here lie in King's casual assumption that a psychology is reducible to an epistemology, and in his jumping to the conclusion that a Constructivist psychology entails solipsism, unique mental events, privacy of meaning, relativism, conventionalism, or whatnot. He is driven to invent a third term of contrast, one that he nowhere explains: my account 'has failed to engage elements of an "environmentalist" approach' (II, p 81). Now the Wisconsin Project is proud of our environment (beautiful lakes, forests, hills and farmland – rather like Kent), but I fail to see its relevance to conceptions of spectatorial activity.

I have already touched upon one of King's most recurrent gaffes, that of confusing definition and description. He thinks that I *define* narrative poetics by the distinction among representation/ structure/ narration (II, pp 57-58), which is like saying that linguistics is defined by the distinction among semantics, syntax, phonology, and pragmatics. He thinks that *describing* a mode of narration amounts to *defining* it (II, p 65). He thinks that I *define* parametric narration as a matter of camerawork when I use that technique (and others) to *illustrate* it (II, p 74). He takes a *description* of replete and sparse options as a *definition* of parametric narration (II, pp 74-75).

Yet when I do offer a definition, King just ignores it. *NiFF* distinguishes between comprehending narrative films (constructing a *fabula*) and 'reading' them (ascribing abstract or symbolic meanings to them). King asks whether the real contrast is not 'between different kinds of readings with different kinds of competences' (II, p 68). This is like saying that baseballs and oranges are not really different things, but rather two kinds of baseballs. We draw definitional distinctions for particular purposes. In his desire to win a purely nominalist point, King ignores my purposes in making the conceptual contrast. Moreover, he does not scrutinise the contrast itself to see if it holds good, but he is so pleased with the term 'reading' that he uses it to characterise my, and others', position throughout. (Recall that the Project's fundamental thrust is 'to establish how readers . . . ' etc.)

King's problem with definitions is bound up with a larger confusion about how categories work in a theoretical argument. For instance, I claim that each mode of narration sets limits on what can be done within it. 'It follows from this,' King says with assurance, 'that what is a compositional option in one mode is ruled out in another' (II, p 65). But this does not follow at all. My argument does not presume that categories are

constrained by unique membership conditions, or by necessary and/or sufficient conditions. A goal-oriented protagonist is an option in Hollywood films; so is it in Soviet montage films; so is it in parametric films. Similarly, King triumphantly claims that the analyses of the films contradict the narrational categories they are supposed to belong to. How dare I say that replete parametric narration uses *syuzhet* parallels when I have said that there are *syuzhet* parallels in a portion of *Storm over Asia*, which does not belong to the parametric mode? By now you can predict that King misses the point of my original claim. (The parallelism in parametric narration functions as redundancy to permit different stylistic options to stand out; the *syuzhet* parallelism in *Storm over Asia* holds the stylistic choices constant.) His basic error, however, is again to make the Carrollian<sup>16</sup> assumption that no property can cross categories. A bat is not a robin, but both can fly, and the *definition* of 'bat' or 'robin', for certain purposes, might include mentioning aeronautical abilities.

Indeed, for all his talk of defining, King is not much interested in distinctions. Where I offer, at some length, specific accounts of different ways in which people make sense of films, he prefers to invoke something called 'competences', which, needless to say, is never explained or defended as a superior conceptual construct. Where I offer detailed analyses of historically varying modes of comprehension, he would rather just say that some 'readers' are 'smarter' than others (II, p 82). The grand hills of Theory, supposedly the domain of nuanced distinctions and subtle analysis, turn out to be as flat as Illinois<sup>17</sup>.

So what does King think theoretical disputation is? Take one of his central points about *CHC* – that it makes the Hollywood system too stable. (That is a mild way of summarising King's fulminations about 'expressive totalities' quoted above.) Now our book offers arguments for why the Hollywood film and the mode of production are *on the whole* stable entities; we provide both theoretical propositions and empirical arguments to back this up. King offers no counter-propositions or alternative empirical arguments – just the Grand Theory assumption that every film and every moment in film-making is teetering on the brink of self-annihilating contradiction. All he can do is repeatedly butt his presuppositions against our case. Such a tactic usually goes by the name of dogmatism.

King also seems to believe that if I criticise a position I must help it find escape routes. In *NiFFI* I mount a case against enunciation theory in cinema. King accepts my critique of the thinkers who promote enunciation theory. But then blind faith takes over: 'To establish that the search for enunciative markers is *futile* requires that other cinematic techniques – sound or music track, colour, or even casting – will not establish an inferential context in which unmarked "objective" shots are rendered "enunciative"' (II, pp 60-61). Put aside the fact that the fundamental thrust of the Wisconsin Project is to establish the identification of the cinematic image, and hence we wouldn't dream of talking about sound or music. Put aside the likelihood that if one cannot

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<sup>16</sup> Note to US readers: I refer to Lewis, not Noël.

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<sup>17</sup> Note to non-US readers: A state to the south of Wisconsin, not yet identified by *Screen* as harbouring a Project.

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show any such markers in the camerwork or the profilmic event, it is unlikely that music, colour, or casting will prove very fecund along these lines. The simple fact remains that if one refutes what the most serious and accomplished thinkers have claimed about their theory and if one offers better answers to the same question, *there is at present no good reason to believe the old theory*. The burden of proof falls to the people who advocate it. If MacCabe, Bellour, Nash, Ropars, *et al*, have erred, it is not my job to counter claims that they haven't yet made. King clings to a theory which he acknowledges has, in the terms proposed to date, broken down. Let *him* fix it up.

A detailed analysis of any passage of the essay would reveal a polyphony of conceptual elisions and muddles. As just one example, consider this typical passage:

*In the discussion of spectator schemata, prototype schemata which indicate generic variables are seen as less useful than template schemata which act as data processors (p 34). These latter processes, which are governed by a rather Kantian synthetic a priori 'narrative structure' over which sit the categories of space and time, are supratextual rather than transtextual. Consequently, one would look in vain for a substantive account of the 'reading' process that engages with what Genette has termed a topic competence based on 'the treasury of subjects and forms that constitute the common wealth of tradition and culture'. Such a grounded competence, especially pertinent to popular culture, barely engages the higher level 'perceptual schemata' which emerge as self-sustaining. (II, pp 70-71)*

The first sentence misrepresents the distinction between prototypes and templates; my *examples* of prototype schemata come from genre, but I also have used genre films to illustrate template schemata. Here is a typical case of King's confusion between description and definition. And both sorts of schemata are 'data processors', so King's opposition is conceptually groundless. Template schemata are not 'governed by' a 'narrative structure'; the latter is, again, an instance of the former. To claim that the narrative structure I describe is a Kantian synthetic *a priori* is a real howler in the light of such claims I make as these: 'Several experiments yield evidence for the schematic function of a "template" of narrative structure in contemporary Western cultures. . . . I suggest only that the formats have heuristic value for analyzing narratives produced and consumed in our culture' (*NiFF*, p 35). And those 'topic competences' for which King yearns need further specification. At present they seem to comprise a list of everything we might know or believe which might be relevant to understanding a film; that is, a list of everything we might know or believe, period. (If King thinks that merely studying Hollywood will strain the research resources of Great Britain, what will this project require?) Anyway, once King supplies us with the set of such 'competences', the real issue is what can *explain* their acquisition and use. And then he will find himself once again facing my claims about prototype, template and procedural schemata. If I

am right, *no such skills could be arrived at* without schemata of the sort I describe. If this is not 'direct engagement' with the issue, what is? Once again, King has butted an unexamined assumption up against a developed argument. What he does not realise, finally, is that these perceptual schemata are not 'self-sustaining'. Unlike film theorists, they require empirical data.

## V.

To my charge that King does not grasp my arguments, he might reply that in three principal instances he counters claims set forth in *CHC* and *NiFF*. The issues at stake are: indexicality, the *syuzhet/fabula* distinction, and the definition (again!) of discourse.

King invokes indexicality in the hope of striking a blow against the 'conventionalism' and anti-realism he imputes to a Constructivist account. He does not, however, mention that *NiFF* explicitly rules the documentary film out of consideration (see p xiv); I would argue that indexicality is undeniably an important factor in how people make sense of documentary films. The point is whether King shows that it is an important factor in how people make sense of *fiction* films. He does not. All he does is quote Roland Barthes on the *analogon*, recycling a claim that Barthes had made fifteen years before and that Bazin had made decades before that (II, pp 69-78).<sup>18</sup> A quotation from Barthes does not automatically carry the day. How do we know that the ontology, epistemology and psychology of the photograph carry over into the cinema? Lots of ink has been spilled on this issue, but King might start with V F Perkins' *Film as Film* (a book which, upon its appearance in 1972, was subjected, in these very pages, to lumberjacking techniques quite similar to King's<sup>19</sup>). Furthermore, there is no question that a Constructivist theory could explain indexicality (as a top-down application of a schema concerning how images are produced). But once more King does not attempt to confute my theory on these grounds – or, as he would say, 'engage the issues'. He runs indexicality together with iconicity, says both apply to fictional cinema, and then, amazingly, connects both to my purported neglect of genre. (An entire chapter of *NiFF* is devoted to genre.) As it turns out, indexicality is just another handy concept to brandish threateningly.

I despair of ever untangling King's treatment of *syuzhet* and *fabula*. To put the matter briefly: the question to be answered is how spectators intersubjectively arrive at essentially the same 'story' when presented with a film. Both *CHC* and *NiFF* argue that the process is one of constructive inference. The particular construct arrived at is called the 'story'. Now terminology starts to diverge. In *CHC*, I argued that the text *in toto* offers us the 'plot', and, since not everything in the text can be said to prompt story-constructing inferences, the aspect of plot which cues the construction of the story I called narration (*CHC*, pp 12, 24).

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<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', in Stephen Heath (ed and trans), *Image-Music-Text*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp 17-18; originally published in 1961; 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *ibid*, pp 44-45; originally published in 1964; André Bazin, 'Ontology of the Photographic Image', in Hugh Gray (ed and trans), *What Is Cinema?*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, pp 9-16; originally published in 1945.

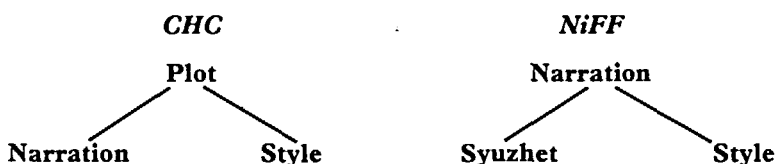
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<sup>19</sup> Sam Rohdie, 'Review: "Movie Reader, Film as Film"', *Screen* Winter 1972/73, vol 13 no 4, pp 135-145.

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Systematically organised aspects of the film medium, which I refer to in this context as style (more on this shortly), are said to be mobilised by narration.

After writing the book, I became convinced that this set of terms was conceptually clumsy (a fact I signalled in *NiFF*, p 344). First, because of the numerous terminological confusions about 'plot', it is better to use the term *syuzhet*. That called for the use of the corresponding term *fabula*; this I continue to treat as synonymous with the inferential construct, the story. Style is still considered to include aspects of the medium, and narration still cues construction of the story. *The only conceptual difference, as I said in NiFF, is that 'narration' now occupies the place previously assigned to 'plot' and that 'syuzhet' now occupies the slot occupied by 'narration'.* King makes heavy weather of this change, calling it 'coy' (I, p 87); but he does not understand it. Just to clarify it, here are two diagrams:



King's counter-arguments rest upon several misapprehensions. As far as *CHC* is concerned, he is convinced that I use an inconsistent conception of style. But rather, I use *two* commonly accepted notions of style. First, there is 'group style' (p 3), which describes commonly used options in storytelling mechanisms and the film medium across a body of films. Take German Expressionism as a group style: it involves not only certain recurrent features of setting, lighting, acting and so on, but also characteristic narrative devices and patterns of overall filmic construction. When we discuss how an individual film utilises the resources of the film medium, we apply a second sense of 'style', that touched on above: the systematic use of film technique, which can *exclude* narrative devices and narrational patterns. The wide acceptance of this dual sense of 'style' may be gauged by Monroe Beardsley's explanation:

*When this term ['style'] is applied to individual objects, it is best used to refer to recurrent features of texture [i.e., small-scale relations among parts]. . . . When the term is applied to groups of objects, to the oeuvre of a given age or of a given painter, it usually refers to recurrent features of texture and structure [i.e., large-scale relations among parts].<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958, p 173.

In *CHC*, so as to obviate confusion, I used 'style' principally in its 'group-style' sense and used 'cinematic space and time' to indicate those features of the film medium that might in other contexts (and without

impropriety) be called 'stylistic'. Mastering this double usage ought to be child's play for any theorist who can, say, read Lacan or Foucault with understanding.

In *NiFF*, the concept of style is applied in the second sense, that of the systematic use of techniques of the medium *within the individual film*. I indicate this explicitly:

*Style also constitutes a system in that it too mobilizes components – particular instantiations of film techniques – according to principles of organization. There are other uses of the term 'style' (e.g., to designate recurrent features of structure or texture in a body of films, such as 'neorealist style'), but in this context, 'style' simply names the film's systematic use of cinematic devices. (NiFF, p 50).*

But King thinks this actually amounts to 'circumlocutions for the extended concept of style' (II, p 63). Why? Because 'if a use is "systematic", it may pertain to a body of films and so on' (II, p 7). True, it *may* under some description, but not under the one I stipulated; so where is the problem? King muddies the water still further by saying, incorrectly, that the distinction between group style and style of the individual film corresponds to the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic norms. He also takes it that style now means '*à la* Barry Salt the enumeration of the use of devices' (II, p 63). No: style is not an aggregate of devices, but a system. To top it all off, King recommends that the concept of style ought to be extended to include 'set design, performance and so on' (II, p 63). Who ever said not? In everything I have ever written, style has included such techniques.

King's capacity to generate phantom problems is even more evident when he discusses the *fabula/syuzhet* pairing. Although a diagram in *NiFF* tries to show that the *interaction* of *syuzhet* and style prompts the construction of a *fabula*, and that this overall process constitutes narration, King insists that the *fabula* is inferred from the *syuzhet* alone (II, p 69). He thinks I should stick to using 'story' and 'plot' throughout, but on seeing how he confuses these (and misrepresents Meir Sternberg's account, and tries to saddle me with E M Forster's story/ plot distinction), I decline his advice.

King also insists that the *fabula* is onscreen. Here we re-encounter his difficulty with definitions. *By stipulative definition*, I make the *fabula* a mental construct. Therefore it is not on screen. But he thinks it is, or anyway, just a little: 'Only if one defines the *fabula* as a mental event is it really meaningful to say that the *fabula* is never materially present on screen. In part it is, even though the *syuzhet* invests it with a "new" meaning' (II, p 70). He suggests we redefine *fabula* as no longer a wholly mental construct. Then what is it? He does not provide a new definition, but he offers two reasons to think of it as material.

1. 'Some of the signifiers on screen, if under the regime of representation of the text, nevertheless have meaning in relation to conventions

which are extracinematic, even if they present the “cinematic apparatus” with problems of working these conditions of reference through textually, e.g., location shots, physical shape of the seen environment, actors’ physical characteristics’ (II, p 69).

But none of this woolly passage counts against making the *fabula* an inference or series of inferences; the cinematic/extracinematic distinction is just irrelevant. I insist throughout *NiFF* that we apply extracinematic knowledge to constructing the *fabula*, but that does not make it material.

2. According to King, the fact that ‘the cinematic figure is always to some extent an *analogon*’ (II, p 70) and an iconic sign makes the *fabula* partly on the screen (II, p 70).

But the image is in fact not always indexically bound to a referent; perhaps King’s disdain for empiricism has made him forget cel animation, drawing and scratching and punching holes on film, etc. And if he says that these too are indexical *analogons* of the process of painting on film, drawing on film, poking holes in film, etc, then he will have to grant that painting and sculpture and printed language are *analogons* in the same sense (i.e., traces of the action of painting, sculpting and printing); in which case Barthes’ claim about the uniqueness of the photographic *analogon* falls. Similarly, the image is not always iconic, not even in ‘realist regimes’. (Has King seen *Fantasia*?) Finally, it is embarrassing to point out to a writer for *Screen* that a sign is not the object it refers to or denotes, and the material and form of the signifier are not identical with the referent. Whether what the image presents really exists or not, there is no sense in which the *fabula* – a signified if ever there was one – can become a physical thing.

Of course, King is free to reject my term, but nothing is clarified if he uses it to christen a sentient entity that is ‘in part’ physical and ‘in part’ mental. What this Frankenstein’s monster thinks about movies remains to be learned.

One more topic elicits counterarguments from King, and they plunge into the same old problems of definition, equivocation and faulty inference. King does not like the way *NiFF* treats the concept of discourse. I start from Benveniste’s definition of the concept in relation to the correspondent notion of *histoire*. I argue that both, especially the concept of discourse, have been unproductively and inconsistently broadened. This has led to conceptual confusions not acknowledged by the users of the term. King thinks that this treats discourse ‘in an overly empirical manner’. For discourse is actually ‘in the extended sense . . . an interpellation process’ (II, p 60). Fine. Is it confined solely to verbal language? If so, how many other interpellation processes are there, and what are they? On the other hand, if interpellation includes all symbolic systems, why refer to *an* interpellation process rather than *the* interpellation process? And since so much hinges on definitions, how about furnishing one of ‘discourse’ in its extended sense – since calling it an interpellation process describes it but does not define it? Recasting big-D



Discourse as 'discursive formation' à la Foucault is no help, since I will again ask how many such formations there are supposed to be, whether interpellation occurs via other processes as well, etc.

I suppose that such questions reveal me to be 'deceptively concrete and unnecessarily restrictive' (II, p 60). So let's get flagrantly abstract and unrestrictive. 'There is a sense,' King says, 'in which all cinema is discursive, since cultural action implies a subject' (II, p 60). In the same sense, all cinema is representational, since representation (as 'cultural action') implies a subject. In the same sense, all cinema is linguistic, in that language implies a subject. In the same sense, all cinema is symbolic, since a symbol implies a subject. In the same sense, all cinema is interpellative, since interpellation implies a subject. In the same sense, all cinema is an object, since all objects imply a subject. Does this make discourse, representation, language, symbol, interpellation and object identical concepts? I would be interested in whether King thinks there is any reason to keep these concepts distinct. If not, then we are back at category problems again, only reversing his earlier troubles: now if one concept shares *any* property with another, it becomes identical with it. Alternatively, if King thinks there is a reason to keep all these concepts distinct, then he ought to be receptive to my attempt to clarify their differences. In fact, though, King's argumentative style answers my question. He prefers to repeat a litany of terms – representational regime, discourse, apparatus, competence, etc – without explaining them. Like idols carried around to make it rain, they are supposed to do work merely by being invoked.

In any event, King is not the best guide to the arid heights of Theory. His extended sense of discourse, no matter how generously interpreted, will not answer my criticisms of MacCabe (who sees discourse as a set of signifying oppositions or as portions of a text structured *vis-à-vis* quotation marks) or of Belsey (who speaks of an 'unwritten discourse' in *Bleak House*). Both writers think of discourse as a text-based phenomenon, but not in Benveniste's sense. Finally, *NiFF* argues that Metz reverses Benveniste's sense of *discours* and *énonciation* in order to discuss cinema. King does not dispute my charge but tries to warrant Metz's broader sense of 'discourse':

*Metz may be 'metaphorical' in his use of Benveniste but, in his terms, the cinema is discursive (i.e., of the symbolic) prior to any specific act of enunciation. This primary identification, as opposed to the secondary or 'continued' identification offered by narrative flow which constitutes Bordwell's level of enquiry is simply not engaged by the distinction between mimetic and diegetic modes of narration. (II, pp 59-60)*

Once more we have to clear away the misrepresentations of my case. Mimetic and diegetic refer not to *modes* of narration but to *theories* of narration. 'Narrative flow', if that means the activities within the diegetic world, is not my sole level of inquiry. And my distinction does

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<sup>21</sup> Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans Celia Britton *et al*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982, pp 49-50.

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capture Metz's usage, for the straightforward reason that King misreads Metz. According to Metz, secondary cinematic identification is not with 'narrative flow' but with the character in the fiction. Moreover, primary cinematic identification relies not on some vague quality of discursiveness but on a set of relays. The spectator identifies with himself as an 'all-perceiving' subject, and thus 'as he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (= framing) determines the vanishing point. . . . His identification with the camera [is] that of a transcendental, not an empirical subject.'<sup>21</sup> From such passages, and those I cite in *NiFF*, do I derive my claim that Metz's diegetic or language-based conceptions of narration rely ultimately on the mimetic assumption that narration requires an invisible, omniscient camera. And this claim King has not refuted by his reference to Metz.

Finally, word reaches me from Paris that in recent seminars Metz has been systematically criticising the application of the concept of enunciation to the cinema. If this is the case, it will be exciting to see how theorists like King will square an Authority's criticisms with their tenacious faith in an enunciation account of narration.

## VI.

By now several of King's rhetorical tactics should have become evident: misstatement, oversimplification, equivocation, begging the question, etc. He will make a claim very boldly in the text and then hedge it in the footnote, or let loose a swarm of irrelevant or rhetorical questions ('How adequate is the distinction between genre and mode? To what extent are narrational modes being depicted rather than modes of reading . . . ?' – II, p 72). He will then move on, implying that it's impossible to iron out all the difficulties in my text. A tactic that merits special notice is his habit of pulling a remark out of context, playing with various ways of construing it, then considering another passage and expressing astonishment that some fancies derived from the first passage do not correspond to the second one. He can get a lot of mileage out of this, as when he claims that I make the telling/showing distinction 'categorical' (whatever that means) while Branigan renders it as two aspects of narration (II, pp 79-80). King muses that perhaps I recast the telling/showing distinction as recounting/enactment in order to avoid an implied criticism from Branigan. But then he says that in fact it doesn't really avoid such a criticism, since it 'invites distinctions at the level of character action that the *fabula/syuzhet* contrast is ill-placed to address' (II, p 80). What these distinctions are he does not say, but he hopes to leave the impression that he has gotten somewhere when all he has been doing is playing solitaire.

One commanding and instructive aspect of King's presentation is his

use of language (or discourse, or the symbolic). A stylistician of art history might say that *Screen* went through a Renaissance (1970-1977), a Baroque period (1977-1982), and a Mannerist phase (1982-present); now, with King's essay, it passes into pure Rococo. Our Project oath, the fundamental-thrust sentence, with its 'accomplish the identification of the cinematic image' phrase, is a fair example of his manner, but his essay's opening salvo is still better.

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<sup>22</sup> Barry King, 'Screen Acting: Reflections on the Day', *Screen* May-August 1986, vol 27 nos 3-4, p 134.

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*It is something of a rebuke, if a fortuitous one, that the diversionary excesses of British Film Year should have also seen the publication of the culminating tranche of a series of texts, more or less connected with the University of Wisconsin, that attempt, and in many ways succeed in, a major re-siting of the relationship between the poetics of film and cinema history. (I, p 74)*

Granted, King likes culminations: *CHC* is the culmination of the Project, just as a day school at the National Film Theatre was 'the culmination of a season of films on performance and film performances . . .'<sup>22</sup> But culminating *tranche*? Next we'll be hearing about penultimate and anticlimactic *tranches*, and then where will we be? I would, however, like to hear more about the diversionary excesses of British Film Year. Who did what to whom? And did someone take photographs? Or at least *analogons*?

The marks of decadence are so evident that I almost wind up believing in the evolutionary model of style. 'Here *syuzhet* is no longer . . . a category that engrosses narration' (II, p 63). (Narration has always been easy to distract.) Branigan's approach 'advances the theorisation of subjectivity which remains ingredient to the theory of ideology' (II, p 75). (Is it the theorisation or the subjectivity which is ingredient? Or is it just me being unreasonably concrete and restrictive again?) 'In relation to the specification of the spectator's activity, Bordwell wishes to operate a distinction between a viewing and a reading' (II, p 67). (Unlike others, I operate distinctions and make an automobile.) 'Mr Style was in the fortunate position of only finding in the cinema his own family' (II, p 63). (Read that over a few times before moving on to a kinship analysis of Comrade Fabula and M. Discours.) I did, however, feel like tugging my forelock at this compliment: 'Bordwell is led again and again to fill out the analysis with (rather good as it happens) "commonsense" descriptions of character orientation and action' (II, p 68). Whatever 'character orientation' means, encouragement like this can only cheer you along.

## VII.

King's essay, while marked throughout by idiosyncrasy, exhibits certain features characteristic of much theoretical writing in film and television studies. Let me indicate, notionally, some of those features:

1. **Reliance on vaporous formulas rather than on explicitly con-**

**structured concepts and propositions.** King says, for instance, that I need 'a' theory of the subject. By this criterion, the research projects I admire most – Tynianov on verse, Shklovsky on prose, Gombrich on the visual arts, Genette and Sternberg on narrative, Baxandall on Renaissance painting – would fail. But what King really wants is a pledge of allegiance to *one* theory, that congeries of fuzzy, inconsistent and equivocal notions that allows him to produce something as gaseous as his review.

**2. Appeal to authority.** The names Derrida, Barthes, Althusser, *et cie*, are dragged in to bless King's critique. How he purrs when Branigan cites *S/Z*: 'Obviously, given the tenor of my remarks as a whole, this is not an unwelcome connection' (II, p 77). He does not consider the possibility that Barthes' book is open to interpretations of which he would not approve; the mere mention suffices. Like many theorists of film, King dwells in the realm of scholasticism, where nothing can be said that is not ratified by reference to a sacred text.

**3. Inflation of terms and concepts.** I have already supplied many instances, but here is a staggering one: Branigan is chided for not being able to address 'cinematic representation *in toto* – anthropomorphic as well as zoomorphic and cosmomorphic representation' (II, p 75). Here Discourse Theory anticipates the Second Coming.

**4. Intellectual provincialism.** The ignorance of Formalism and cognitive theory is one example. Another is King's claim that *NiFF* is not commensurate with 'psychoanalytic accounts of cinema' (II, p 71); but he plainly has in mind only *Screen's* versions of Lacan. There are various sorts of psychoanalysis – something to be borne in mind by the theorist who automatically begins sentences with 'Psychoanalysis teaches us that . . . '.

**5. Critique as rectification.** I don't mean only rectification in its Stalinist form, as when King weighs Branigan's argument for its 'complicity' (II, p 75). Rectification has a more opportunistic side, when the 'lumberjacking' technique turns into a salvage operation: translate any intriguing empirical findings into the terms of the preferred dogma, then reject disagreeable findings on grounds that they don't square with it. Since classical texts *must* be ready to break down, any account that argues that they aren't so fragile gets rejected summarily: 'Whether [the authors of *CHC*] are prepared to take this step is uncertain, but I suspect that in the future use of their work it will be taken for them' (I, p 88). We supply grist for the Theory mill to grind out the same old Contradictory Text.

Nevertheless, King's essay betrays signs of change. For one thing, his mention of Derrida, his invocation of analog/digital jargon, his Bazin-flavoured view of referentiality, his appeals to realism and anti-conventionalism, and his savouring of 'the emergent richness of meaning' as testified to by Bresson's own words – all this suggests that different, and one might say 'contradictory' winds are blowing in the upper reaches of Theory. Moreover, the terrain has shifted. Now subject-

position theory must compete with powerful splinter groups. There are the Postmodernists, who lack the proper devotion to Lacan and Althusser. There are also the Cultural Studies people, who seek a politically engaged media analysis that unabashedly rejects the links with the avant-garde that were so central to much in *Screen* of the 1970s. (For these theorists, television, brimming with emergent readings and glimpses of Utopia, is plenty avant-garde enough.) This is not to mention the Deconstructionists, who threaten to turn theory utterly relativist and dilettantish. In sum, SLAB (Saussure-Lacan-Althusser-Barthes) theory no longer holds undisputed sway.

Perhaps this is why King spends so much time fretting over our work. It might somehow help sustain a comatose paradigm, with those platoon of theses taking shifts running the respirator. Of course, King's concern about the impact of our work might be merely a culminating *tranche*. *Screen's* recent issues on 'Deconstructing Difference' and Postmodernism may herald changes in Big Theory.

In any event, the Wisconsin Project, although unmasked, remains at large. And we are used to surviving long winters.

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# A REPLY TO BORDWELL, STAIGER AND THOMPSON

BY BARRY KING

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<sup>1</sup> The citation of Mieke Bal comes from p19. The reference to p25 which I considered using as well but dropped in a rewriting, refers to actors who have no function in the *fabula*, but are nevertheless significant as sociological indicators.

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BEFORE MOVING TO the detail of my response, it is necessary, apparently, to comment on the term 'the Wisconsin project'. Bordwell and Thompson – the former to the extent of gratuitously capitalising 'project' – are convinced that such a term is necessarily monolithic. As such it denies that they have other interests, not to mention the denial that there are other individuals active in cinema or film study at the University of Wisconsin. The term 'project' was deployed, in a loose Sartrean sense, to denote the fact that the various writers of the texts to be reviewed have as the object of their efforts the establishment of a distinctive theory of the classical Hollywood cinema, of cinematic narration and the activity of the spectator. Such a term does not entail absolute allegiance to *all* the propositions by *all* the participants nor does it deny differences of emphasis within it. What it does claim is that there is a sufficient level of convergence of concern to establish *not* identity, but a 'family' resemblance. How one gets from this position to the claimed failure to appreciate that in other works the authors do other things or other researchers do other things, is not entirely clear.

Turning to a direct consideration of the content of the replies, it is apparent that I cannot enter a response to every point raised. Some of the points are raised by all three authors and some seem of only peripheral or *ad hominem* significance. I shall of necessity be selective. But since that is precisely the way these authors responded to my original review, I feel that this is not an option I should deny myself.

## I

Before responding to David Bordwell directly, let me deal with one matter on which we do agree.

I apologise for the citation errors in the review and for the fact that checking procedures failed to iron them out. I can at least eat humble pie with a small sauce of consolation since no serious distortion is entailed, as Bordwell's speculation that I might be bent on improvement (were that not impossible) suggests. Further, the difficulty of matters is only underscored by the fact that *even* Bordwell in his reply finds a passage (II, p 56) where there is none and says I leave out 'the activities of the spectator' when these are mentioned in the next paragraph (I, p 76).<sup>1</sup>

This said, the chief difficulty I have in responding to his other points is that he has placed in my way a little *ad hominem* theatre – showing, as it were, a farce by Brian Rix in the tradition of Artaud – wherein I am strung according to his pleasure. To proceed I need to remove a few of the strings:

Bordwell evidently has problems with generalisations. Having gone on at length about the reifying horrors of the ‘Wisconsin project’, he is quite happy to posit a similar entity. I am, apparently, a quintessential moment of the *Screen* tradition. If it happens that I seem to hold views – my Bazin-flavoured view of referentiality – that do not fall readily into his idea of the tradition, then I am horribly confused. Likewise, since *Screen* is monolithically opposed to the kind of enquiry he sees himself undertaking, if I evidence any approval of the ‘project’ I am merely hedging my bets. Again, when I fail to give detailed attention to the parts of his work he *thinks* *Screen* ought to be interested in, it can only be that I have not read that part of his work. The blatant polemical value of these devices is plain, but their use has the consequence of leading Bordwell to misread my review at a number of points. To choose one example, he says that, following *Screen*’s Lacanian orthodoxy, I cannot conceive of alternative psychoanalytical accounts of the cinema. Yet on the page he quotes I indicate, following Gertrud Koch, the possibility of a psychoanalysis of objects derived from the work of Sartre and Gaston Bachelard.<sup>2</sup> Since Bordwell’s account leaves little space for either approach, his opinion here is not entirely edifying.

Next, and more perniciously, Bordwell is relentless in presenting me (and, by extension, any other reviewer) as absolutely required to offer counter-evidence or an alternative substantive theory. Since what I am actually doing is attempting to assess the integrity of work that is (presumably) conclusive enough to set before the general reader in the area of film and media studies, such demands are beside the point. Such requirements, which in any case confuse a *review* with a *refutation*, would render the work unreviewable, short of total approval. This may be the point.

Related to this self-serving ordinance is the expectation that any reviewer (or for that matter any reader) should have an intimate acquaintance with the *primary* literature on which Bordwell builds his arguments. One could, indeed, go back to the primary literature, but then one would be reviewing Bordwell’s gloss of that literature and not his arguments in the texts under review. There is enough to do in respect of the latter – notwithstanding the question of whether Bordwell’s reading procedures are worthy of such attention.

If these hypertrophied expectations were not enough, Bordwell motivates them within a melodramatic scenario in which it is taken as axiomatic that if I assess his arguments I am necessarily endorsing the positions he criticises. But this returns us to our point of entry into the little theatre of Professor Bordwell – the notion of a unitary *Screen* tradition. Bordwell clearly needs this formation more than *Screen* does.

But it is now time to get up out of my seat in that theatre. As for the

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<sup>2</sup> Had Bordwell been less obsessed with culminations he would have found a parallel reference in my ‘Screen Acting: Reflections on the Day’, *Screen* May–August 1986, vol 27 nos 3–4, pp 134–139.

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<sup>3</sup> Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's 'Ivan the Terrible': a Neo-formalist Analysis*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Alan Swingewood, *Sociological Poetics and Aesthetic Theory*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986, p 68 ff.

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drama, with its badgers, lumberjacks and rectifiers, I hope the readers have found it interesting and amusing. As for my opinion, I would be dishonest if I did not admit that Bordwell's sense of humour reveals him as Marxist of the Zeppo tendency.

## II

Turning to matters of interpretation and disagreement, given the format of Bordwell's response I can do no other than respond in a point by point fashion. As far as possible, I will strive to make points of general relevance rather than engage in a personal dialogue, though, as readers will appreciate, this is no easy matter.

Bordwell raises the question (and by implication suggests this is a prerequisite for understanding his arguments) of my competence in Formalism. I am quite happy to admit that I am not expert in such matters and doubtless this defect led me to assume that Jameson's and Bennett's texts were more substantial than Bordwell, from the depth of his expertise, finds to be the case. To make matters worse, I held that these texts and, others besides, e.g., Thompson's *Ivan the Terrible*<sup>3</sup>, would provide me with enough of a purchase on the basic terms to make a reasonable appraisal. There was, alas, a profundity I failed to tap.

The clearest evidence of all this is my capsule statement, as Bordwell has it, of the Formalist position. But, as the review makes plain I am not offering a definition of *the* Formalist position, but defining what formalism (small f) means in the context of these texts. The larger issue I am happy to leave to the experts, though even my level of acquaintance suggests that Bordwell's use of Mukarovsky, for example, is selective, playing down the role of sociopolitical norms within the artwork.<sup>4</sup> Granted that Bordwell prefers his own style of writing, it is nonetheless the case that my capsule statement, if not perfect, is reasonably adequate to *its object*, albeit not to the object Bordwell wishes to foist on it. Given this context, his objection to 'a means of narration' falls. The term 'as a means of signification' refers to the medium and not to a principle of formalist analysis. There is a need, as indeed Janet Staiger points out, to distinguish between recognising the semiotic nature of a medium and doing an analysis based on semiotics. The reason for adding this qualifier here was to indicate that the writers give some recognition to matters of ideology and signification and do not assume, for example, Barry Salt's 'physicalist' standpoint.

I am quite happy to agree with Bordwell that the Formalists are concerned with describing a function not a medium. But I am sceptical about the rigour of such a distinction in the light of their analyses in *CHC*, for example, which strive to show how under definite socio-historical conditions specific functions become coterminous with cinema *per se* or 'Hollywoodness'. I take it we can disagree about this. But I think there is a potential for confusing in their account this very distinction.



Lastly, Bordwell finds it a serious fault that I use the term 'Russian Formalist tradition' without explicitly signalling the modifications in this tradition by the Prague School. This, Bordwell opines, is yet another symptom of my incomprehension. Rather, it is a symptom of my belief that the term tradition can be used as a term of location in a paradigm. I would use the term 'Marxist tradition' with equal equanimity, even though it contains both Ralph Milliband and Nicos Poulantzas or, as Staiger suggests in her listing, Paul Hirst and Erik Olin Wright. These authors have very different positions but this does not refute a 'family' resemblance. One might consider 'the *Screen* tradition', once again, in this light.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar vein, Bordwell regards it as significant indicator of my inability to understand the basic arguments of his other key source, Cognitive Psychology, that I do not recognise that prototype and template schemata are both data processes. Other things being equal, *literally* speaking he is correct. But other things are far from equal. In his account of narrative comprehension Bordwell emphasises that template schemata have the function of principles of higher level ordering or 'fil-ing systems' that integrate prototype schemata which are generically based. In addition, since he offers no other example, his account equates template schemata with the canonic story format which is supratextual or supra-generic – or if one prefers, in the West at least, culture-free. The question he evades is whether an account of the spectator's activity can work at the level of abstraction from concrete readings that his prioritising emphasis on template schemata implies – his apparent admiration for the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is somewhat puzzling in this regard.

The kind of competences I had in mind were those that are formed in the individual by virtue of his or her social location and patterns of cultural acquisition and consumption. (The work of Pierre Bourdieu is relevant here.) For me the problem is to show how a regularity such as the canonic story format emerges (if it does, since it might be an artefact of the level of analysis) out of a plurality of readings. Bordwell's understanding of cognitive theory may be firm, but is his use of it? For example, even as a non-expert, I find his transportation of concepts from an account of memory to narrative comprehension warrants serious challenge. Again when he asserts that any other account of narrative comprehension will necessarily be driven to use the same concepts, he seems to equate a way of theorising cognitive activity with that activity itself. Since this error is held to be characteristic of cognitive theory in general, this is perhaps understandable.<sup>6</sup> As for environmentalism, Bordwell is clearly enjoying one of his jokes. Given his grasp of the field, he knows the term refers to the general position argued, for instance, by Gombrich in 'Image and Code'<sup>7</sup> or in the particular variant called an ecological approach by James Gibson<sup>8</sup>, that all that is necessary for perception is in the environment and not in the mind. Great fun!

Turning to the question of 'information theory' Bordwell berates me for not understanding the difference between cognitive theory and in-

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<sup>5</sup> cf 'Throughout, the theory elaborates concepts present in Russian Formalist work and the writings in that tradition by Jan Mukarovsky, Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Genette, Meir Sternberg and Seymour Chatman', David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, op cit, p xiii.

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<sup>6</sup> See Jeff Coulter, *Rethinking Cognitive Theory*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1983, chapter 1.

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<sup>7</sup> EH Gombrich, 'Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation', *The Image and the Eye*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1986, pp 278-297.

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<sup>8</sup> James J Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co, 1979, chapter 16.

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<sup>9</sup> See Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982.

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<sup>10</sup> See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, op cit, p 284.

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<sup>11</sup> See Edward Branigan, '“Here is a Picture of No Revolver!” The Negation of Images and Methods for Analysing the Structure of Pictorial Statements', *Wide Angle*, vol 8 nos 3-4, pp 8-17.

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formation theory, because the latter is a discrete theoretical tradition unrelated to the former. Only on a very strict and anachronistic definition is this the case. The relevance span of information theory has moved forward from Shannon's terms of reference in 1948 and now can be held to cover a convergence of hitherto discrete fields – cybernetics, systems theory, information theory (in the strict sense), cognitive psychology, linguistics and more besides.<sup>9</sup> Given this phenomenon of *reflected meaning* and the general configuration of their arguments – entailing systems thinking, e.g., the Classical style, information theory (Meyer<sup>10</sup>), concepts derived from artificial intelligence which itself is developing as a match of cognitive theory and computer systems (Winograd<sup>11</sup>) – this use seems warranted. I am happy to admit some terminological hesitations – cognitive theory goes to the movies was too restrictive. Artificial intelligence goes to the movies might be construed as an insult. So I settled on information theory. I am quite happy to abandon the term. But not the substance of the point: that despite Bordwell's agnosticism on ideology and the like, his theory of spectatorship entails a particular kind of subject. As for Staiger and Thompson, I take it that arguments can be supportive of a position without consciously adopting that position.

Next, it seems trite, but I appear to need to remind Bordwell that I am offering a condensed appraisal of a body of writing that exceeds my review by a factor of at least 100. The only way to proceed in such a circumstance, since after all is said and done I hope that readers will turn to the texts themselves, is to give my summary of the general tendency of the argument. Bordwell insists at great length that any general statements of tendency are empirical statements about the contents of the text(s). Thus, if I conclude that the articulation of narrative structure and representation with narration is never subjected to a substantial analysis in his text, with the unacceptable consequence that narration is conflated with textuality, this is taken as an empirical statement about contents. Likewise, when I suggest that the theory of narration operates at a level of abstraction from the text so that the analysis of specific films seems to rely on a disparate and more conventional notion of genre and the like, this is taken as an empirical statement that the text contains no close analysis. If I conclude that narrative logic, which subsumes on this account space and time, is mainly rendered as causality and that as a consequence parallelism is assimilated to a causal function, this is inferred as a failure to mention a rigorously explored dimension of narrative. I would agree with this if *Narration in the Fiction Film* contained such an exploration, but on my reading it doesn't.

I am quite happy to have Bordwell point these and other emphases out, even if some seem trivial. But let us be clear: to mention something is not necessarily to articulate it into an account. Bordwell goes in for a lot of 'technical' coverage. It is the articulation of the concepts that I am seeking to identify.

Having spent a brief while exposing some of the rhetorical underpinnings of Bordwell's response, I want now to address matters of straightforward disagreement.

Bordwell represents me as conflating a sign and its referent when, in fact, as the context makes clear (and anyone with a crib's knowledge of semiotics would know), signs vary in respect of the degree to which the material of the signifier partakes of the signified. In other words, signs are more or less conventional, more or less motivated. Again, he seems to feel that indexicality is only a feature of documentary, when as a proponent of formalism he should know that this sign function is only dominant in such a genre. Again, a painting is not an analogon in the same sense as a photograph (still or moving): the former may exhibit iconically-based resemblances to the referent, but indexicality only operates as a trace of the painter not the painted – though perhaps Bordwell has in mind dragging paint-daubed nudes over canvases. In the photographic image both relationships of reference are articulated. Generally speaking, as he amply demonstrates, Bordwell does not understand the distinction between an analogue and an analogon. Barthes' use of the archaic term analogon was precisely to catch the distinctiveness of photography.

Bordwell points out correctly that I use the term 'reading' throughout when he claims to be doing an 'analysis'. I clearly state that I think he is offering a reading despite what he claims. But it goes further than this: via some laboured wordplay he wants to suggest that the distinction between different kinds of reading and different kinds of competence is analogous to saying oranges and baseballs are the same thing. Of course, if you bite or whack the wrong one you know the difference. That's empiricism. Apart from the fact that it is not very sound logic to equate statements about complex entities with simple entities, Bordwell cannot even operate his own contrast which should be, strictly speaking (*vide*: his example of bats and robins sharing flight) baseballs and oranges grouped around some common property, e.g., sphericity. In other words, it is consistent for me to claim what he calls analysis is in fact a reading and to call for a contrast between his account and other readings. (On the question of description versus definition I will have more to say below.) Again, I don't say some readers are smarter than others, I say smartness is an attribute which is only meaningful in a context which valorises a particular kind of reading.

As for defining my terms, it should be obvious enough that I need in a review to assume a broad familiarity on the part of the readership with the terms I use. I do not think I am mistaken in this assumption. But for the sake of clarification let me say: discourse is used to identify the essentially dialogic nature of speech and writing and analogous forms of meaning production in the mechanical media. My Bakhtinian emphasis on the dialogic nature of discourse is meant to underscore the fact that any consideration of meaning cannot be successfully divorced from the

social relations that prior to any item of discourse limit what is a valid form of expression and by extension who is a valid producer or consumer of that form and its associated content. Further, these latter relationships (and others besides) need to be seen as articulations (relationships of power and knowledge) which determine what the meaning variation of a given text will be in a specifiable historical or social context. A text, as I see it, is always a problematic intersection of a number of discourses. A representation is a signifier which is tied, conditionally, to a relation of reference, which from the perspective of alternative discourses may appear reductive and arbitrary. I could go on, but I think readers will recognise the provenance of this sort of position, even if they do not agree with it.

Rather let me say this: terms like subject, discourse, interpellation and the like are not free floating signifiers that can be shuffled as though they were merely formal equivalents. Bordwell wishes to establish that these terms are tautological, but all he actually establishes, apart from his dislike of the terms, is that if they are abstracted from their conditions of articulation they can be rendered as tautologies. In this he exhibits what might be called context blindness. The effect of this syndrome is rather analogous to evaluating the use of the term 'elasticity' in Economics by consulting underwear catalogues.

Turning to the theory of spectator activity, it is apparently a telling flaw in my reading that I characterise his approach as hypothetico-deductive. On his account it is patently inductive, *although* it uses hypotheses. There is a need to distinguish between what a spectator does in 'making sense' of a particular film which may be presented as a wholly inductive process and the theorisation of the regularities (if there are such) that govern or condition such a process. But since the process of making inferences from the film unfolding is on Bordwell's account conditioned by the operation of schemata, it follows that identifying what is a valid instance on which to base an inference is a process of deduction. In other words, inductive reasoning is, barring the possibility of an enumeration of all the instances subsumable under a universal proposition, a form of deduction.<sup>12</sup> To generalise the point, I would argue that spectators do not arrive at the 'text' with an 'open' mind, but, on the contrary, with a range of expectations – some proper to the cinema *per se* and some proper to their position in extra-cinematic discursive practices – that condition inference making. A given film may confirm or upset such expectations – and I think it is a virtue of these writers' work that it identifies some of the ways in which this can occur – but this does not mean that spectators are only operating inductively.

I still remain puzzled why the spectator's activity in historical materialist film is said by Bordwell to be purely inductive. (Incidentally, I don't say the Soviet films of the '20s and '30s are about 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. I say this is an example of the kind of didactic guide that this mode of narration might offer.)

These considerations lead to the question of a realist reading. Bord-

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<sup>12</sup> MR Cohen and E Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, pp 275 ff.

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well represents my comments here as a denial of what is patently the case, that he offers the elements of a theory of how a film's narrational strategy may lead to a spectator response that undervalues the film's own discursive practices as opposed to other practices clustered around the point of reception. Actually what I question is why he chooses to present thematic readings as 'bad' readings rather than as consistent readings given a specific level of competence in the spectator. Furthermore, since I don't accept that readings are exclusively a function of these aspects of textual organisation that Bordwell emphasises, it follows that I find his treatment of thematic readings vestigial. He is certainly entitled to claim that this is not what he is doing. But then he forfeits the right to pronounce on the validity of such readings.

Turning to the central issue of style. I have already made it clear that my preference is for a conception of style that is linked to ideology. This is not Bordwell's preference, rather he prefers to assume that style can be studied as an immanent phenomenon. Given this restriction, ably signalled by the citation from Beardsley, the pertinent issue becomes how to explain the mediation between the microcosmic (ideographic) sense of style and style as a macrocosmic phenomenon which carries the (nomological) sense of lawlike regularity. I don't profess to be able to answer the problem of reconciling these approaches – though I think Hadjinicolaou<sup>13</sup> has interesting things to say in this regard. I do, however, recognise that it is a question pertinent to Bordwell's enquiry which he may be reasonably expected to not merely identify but provisionally answer. After all, he claims to have demonstrated that a certain body of films can be characterised (despite individual differences) as belonging to a group style. If a particular film can be described as validly belonging to the classical cinema, then some of its immanent characteristics must pertain to this *genus*. In suggesting that the difference between *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and *Narration in the Fiction Film* is that of a conception of style, Bordwell throws into question the very concept of systematicity advanced in the first study.

I read Bordwell as saying that the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic norms might offer a way of reconciling the two senses of style. But this is not so. Yet if it is true as he asserts (*NiFF*, p 150) that 'a film may accede (differentially) to the reigning set of norms: nearly all Hollywood films do this' and that such films may also set up intrinsic norms, 'standards attained within the text itself' (*ibid*), it is difficult, for me at any rate, to see how the two conceptions of style are not, in fact, in some sense interrelated in any mode of narration.

If on the other hand, as he suggests, a deviation from an *extrinsic* norm can be considered in isolation from a deviation from an *intrinsic* norm, it is difficult to see how the concept of group style could survive the analysis of a specific film. In either case, I fail to see how the shift in the definition of style between *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and *Narration in the Fiction Film* can be regarded as irrelevant to their respective arguments.

In the same connection. Bordwell berates me for making too much of

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<sup>13</sup> Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, London, Pluto, 1978.

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the repositioning of *syuzhet* (plot) and narration between the same texts. But there is more at issue here than merely the spatial repositioning of terms. In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, narration is that aspect of the text *in toto* – the *syuzhet* (plot) – that transmits story information, mobilising stylistic devices to attain this objective. The specific effectivity of narration rests on the manner in which ‘it’ transmits story information – with a variable degree of self-consciousness, knowledgeability and communicativeness. A narrative film is argued to consist of three systems: narrative logic, the representation of time and of space. But the classical narrative film is marked by a specific articulation of these three systems, a dominant in which narrative causality is rendered through character and, pre-eminently, compositional motivation. It is this dominant, this tendency for the classical film to give an unequal weight to this specific kind of causality, that ‘provides’ the guidelines for the activity of narration. While Bordwell does not say explicitly that it is the *syuzhet* that ‘imposes’ these guidelines (he says ambiguously that the distinction *syuzhet/fabula* cuts across the three system distinction, *CHC*, p 13), it follows by definition that this is the case. At any rate, he does not explicitly identify any other immanent formative process of sufficient generality (‘the totality of formal and stylistic materials in the film’, *NiFF*, p 344) and the notion of a dominant warrants this conclusion. If the relationship between plot, narration and style in the classical film is hierarchical, so that style is subordinated to narration and narration to *syuzhet*, it is not merely open to a ‘free’ spatial reallocation. If narration now occupies the ‘slot’ once held by *syuzhet*, there is a (potentially) different kind of formative relationship. In other words, the slots are not equal in respect of their causal weight.

Of the new relationship in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell offers no account of what this shift entails, he merely describes it. Has narration now assumed the role of inscribing the ‘dominant’ in classical film? If so what does this mean for *Narration in the Fiction Film* and its arguments?

It is not my place to second guess Bordwell, but in my view the switching between narration and *syuzhet* that founds the analysis in *Narration in the Fiction Film* is spurious. This is because, I believe, that in this latter text, Bordwell effectively equates narration with the action of the *syuzhet*, which in classical narration, the crucial case, subtends style to ‘its’ ordering. This means, in effect, that any film now entails a two-term system of interaction: *syuzhet* and style. Such an attenuation of the concept of narration is principally signalled by Bordwell’s formal definition, which defines narration as a process constructed out of the interaction of *syuzhet* and style, rather than a third dynamic in the process of interaction. But it takes its theoretical warrant from the implicit decision to treat narration as a process without a narrating instance, e.g., an implied author<sup>14</sup>, and, correspondingly, a concretely defined narratee – the spectator.

As I see it, this elision is built on assuming the efficacy of dimensions of narrative (that can be loosely defined as story constructing informa-

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<sup>14</sup> Seymour Chatman, Review of *Narration in the Fiction Film*, *Wide Angle*, vol 8 nos 3-4.

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tion) which underpin, but are never effectively articulated into, his account. These dimensions I counterpose (somewhat repetitiously I now feel) to the higher level ordering of the *syuzhet*. The implied query – how does this lower level of determination which structures, in part, story information relate to Bordwell’s theory of narration – is brushed aside as an invitation to consider E M Forster. On the contrary, it is an invitation to consider a dimension that Forster’s original specification and Sternberg’s treatment point towards.

One last matter needs to be clarified under the heading of style. Bordwell reads me as challenging his analysis of Bresson’s *Pickpocket*. But what I am actually doing is examining what happens to his definition of style in the course of his reading, *not* whether such a reading is intrinsically valid. Given this restriction, I remain unconvinced that I need to give ground on the problems of parametric narration, even if I accept the corrections to my account Bordwell suggests. Moreover, I find myself puzzled by Bordwell’s indignation that I should quote Bresson back at him. Just as he says I should not reject a position I don’t like wholesale, e.g., formalism, so I take it that a dread of auteurism should not lead to the assumption that a director can never offer an adequate theorisation of his or her own practice. I detect a potential contradiction in Bordwell’s assertion that his conception of style has always entailed not merely camerawork, but other coding practices, such as set design, performance and the like, and his attempt to establish the terms of minimalist film style. Likewise, in his rejection of the view that enunciative markers might operate elsewhere in the diegesis, he shows that his view of what is pertinent to the representation of intentionality, which is a central, if problematic, ingredient of the concept style, is far from parsimonious. As with style, it is to be understood that his search for enunciative markers has already subsumed camerawork *and* the profilmic event, i.e., all the fabricative events that construct or re-present the profilmic.

Given this generalising sweep it is hardly surprising that Bordwell can claim that further analysis is unlikely to prove fecund. In both cases, what is to be explained in the light of a definition is taken as already included in the definition. In the specific case of style, I hold the opinion that Bresson’s theorisation, centring on the *image*, offers a more consistent way of characterising the relationship between a minimalist compositional strategy and textual richness.

This brings me to the question of the *fabula*. Bordwell’s response is evasive. For many theorists, e.g., Culler<sup>15</sup>, Chatman<sup>16</sup>, the early Shklovsky<sup>17</sup>, the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet* is a distinction between pre-existent story materials and the manner in which these pre-existent materials are ordered in the text. (A parallel use is found in film theory as in E Ann Kaplan’s distinction between discourse and diegesis.<sup>18</sup>) These pre-existent story materials have both a ‘mental’ and material existence in that they are already pre-given as a stock of ideas and/or texts (or, indeed, performances).

Bordwell’s use of the *fabulasyuzhet* couplet is quite different – a fact

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp 169 ff.

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<sup>16</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1978.

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<sup>17</sup> See L Matejka and K Pomorska (eds), *Readings in Russian Poetics*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1971, p 20.

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<sup>18</sup> E Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, London and New York, Methuen, 1983, pp 18-19.

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he notes but never actually justifies. For him, the term *syuzhet* begins to operate in a manner that conflates the ordering instance of the text and what is ordered (pre-existent 'stuff') given that *fabula* is now rendered as a psychological entity. Let me note the obvious point, that if this contrast were rendered phenomenologically the *fabula* in Bordwell's sense would become a resource that the spectator brings to bear on a text, which in itself is likely to be determined by pre-existent materials and discourses – such is one of the senses of intertextuality. Such a general notion of what might be part of a 'hermeneutic' circle is not addressed in Bordwell's account.

Obviously if the *fabula* is exclusively an inferential entity, then it is quite inconsistent to suggest that it is a complex discursive formation which is brought to bear on the consumption of a given film. But I am not actually operating with Bordwell's definition, but trying to problematise it in the service of the definition I prefer. If I had to confine myself to Bordwell's meaning then I would want to suggest that there is a need to make a distinction between *inferences* and *percepts*, with the latter defined as already coded signals from the environment. Much of what I say about the analogon or about film as performance rests on this distinction. In connection with the materiality of the *fabula*, Bordwell feels I grievously misrepresent his sense by editing his statement about Jeff on screen in *Rear Window*. I have to admit that I felt that the phrase 'many other ways' rendered the succeeding phrase 'requiring no sight or sound of Jeff at all' redundant. But, perhaps, the emphasis is worth adding. It is, however, irrelevant to the point I am making and this empirical instance makes – sometimes elements of the *fabula* are on screen. When I read that, according to Bordwell, I claim their approach 'abandons the question of meaning altogether' and find that, unlike Thompson, he does not add 'by means of rendering all content an equal expression of form', I don't feel too penitent.

This brings me to the question of definitions. Bordwell says that I do not understand the distinction between a definition and a description. I have, to an extent, to plead guilty because I hold to the view that a description is a form of definition. To demonstrate this would require a long detour into formal logic which I confess myself not the best person to undertake. Perhaps I can satisfy (!) Bordwell by pointing him to the work of one of his heroes, Michael Baxandall<sup>19</sup>, where this point is made more elegantly than I could make it. I feel reasonably confident, however, in saying the following:

Bordwell tells me that his definitions are stipulative definitions, sometimes called nominal definitions. Such definitions fix the meaning of a new term when it is introduced or, alternatively, seek to limit the meaning of a term which is well established, but woolly, to a particular meaning in a body of writing. Such definitions are neither true nor false, but rather propose that X will always mean Y in this context. In their worst form, and Bordwell will relish this Carrollian moment, stipulative definitions mean that an author is saying, like Humpty Dumpty, that X means whatever he wants it to mean. Let me be gracious and say that

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985, chapter 1.

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Bordwell intends his definitions to be judged by their usefulness. I have given my opinion on that, which is clearly not the last word. But it would be remiss of me not to point out that much of Bordwell's criticism of me rests on the defence of stipulative definitions. Nor do I think he helps his own case by insisting that his definitions are not bound by unique membership conditions *or* necessary or sufficient conditions. The first is plausible, the second is a hefty step towards Humpty Dumptyism.

Conversely, his definitions may be, as I originally believed, theoretical definitions. Such definitions, which are notoriously debatable, aim to formulate a theoretically adequate or scientifically useful characterisation of the objects to which the term applies. Does Bordwell really want to claim that he is only offering stipulative definitions? I think he does his own work some disservice.

#### IV

In conclusion, the matter of empiricism: Bordwell and his co-writers grossly misrepresent my position here. When I say that the research undertaken would require a platoon of theses to evaluate it I mean just that. Many of the empirical claims in these works have in the short term to be taken at face value. My review offered itself as a test of the adequacy of the theory which I believe underwrites the empirical analysis. This is admittedly difficult, because even if the authors are more scrupulous than other writers, they give very little detail of their underlying methodology. For example, as far as I can determine, the criterion of aesthetic pertinence governs the scrutiny of the films analysed, though the limitations of this criterion are not considered. Again, I am told that viewing procedures were uniform and what was enumerated, but not how the various elements from shot scale through to significant dialogue were weighted in importance or by what criteria they were rendered comparable. In short, how was uniformity achieved? In regard to these and other questions – how does the unbiased sample relate to the extended sample? – I am not inclined to be too sceptical. But given the fact that such questions are left open, Bordwell cannot honestly disqualify an evaluation of these particular texts that sets aside a detailed consideration of methodology if he does not provide such an account himself.

Bordwell sees a serious, not to mention crass, flaw in my suggestion that it might have been more effective to institute a random selection of films within a sampling frame that took as given, in the late silent period, the eight majors. In principle he feels this or any other frame would be absurd because 'the point of the unbiased sample is exactly not to weight the selection by such *a priori* decisions'. He does not seem to have heard of stratified random sampling which is entirely legitimate when a given universe is prestructured: the issue is not whether the majors existed but rather whether the films they produced or distributed

showed up certain constancies. If Bordwell's point is taken to the letter it would follow that Barry Salt's statistical style analysis, which logs a device such as cutting rate without reference to its production – and indeed ideological – context, is more rigorous. Clearly, taking a random sample of films without respect to their studio location, sets aside difficult questions of deciding which films are representative in the early silent period, given that the full institutionalisation of the classical system is achieved subsequently, but this merely argues for a different approach to 'pre-studio' films.

I do not claim to know of other resources, though I suspect, as Kevin Brownlow has been demonstrating for years, that the list of survivors, and more important our notions of the completeness of the films that survive, is subject to a constant updating. I merely pointed out that had the procedure of stratified random sampling been adopted it would have strengthened our acceptance or rejection of the claim that the classical style transcended differences at the level of studio organisation. Since it is always a danger that the perceived uniformity is, in fact, an artefact of the analyst's reading procedures (and this applies to us *all*) it is useful to make the test of the data as strong as possible. Without pronouncing on the issue of availability, it seems unlikely, in the post-silent period, that so few films produced or distributed by the majors are available from each to make random sampling within each slot impossible. If it turns out that what I suspect is not the case, then it may have been necessary to consider other ways of constituting the sample. Clearly the overweighing of Warner Brothers is a problem.

I can agree with Bordwell's tautological assertion that the data he and his co-authors produce is better set to sustain the kind of generalisations they are seeking than analyses by other writers who use a single film. (But I have to leave open the question of whether these other authors are seeking to make the same kind of analysis.) I also agree that their methodology as presented sets new standards of rigour and evidence – in fact my review said that the high standard the authors set themselves means questions of data are worth raising.

Lastly, since it is raised elsewhere, I need to point out the other empirical issue Bordwell raises: the Toland question. The point I am signalling here is this: does the conception of the classical cinema as a general process not conflict with the micronarrative of technical (and other) change in such a way as to install an overarching teleology? From the perspective of such a micronarrative, the notion of the classical cinema as remaining unchanged – *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* – looks like a disengagement between two distinct levels of analysis which the authors pursue at the same time. I am not claiming I could do better. But the characterisation of the classical cinema as an entity which is firm at its boundaries but, internally, is *very* flexible, can mean that change at the micronarrative level is by definition rendered as a sort of tinkering.

Janet Staiger's response, if read after Bordwell's, is in many ways a model of restraint. Let me pass on the unhelpful opening in which she reads me as a kind of impossible theoretical object. I don't say I have an allegiance to 'deconstruction, Lacan feminism and postmodernism'. I say if one has an allegiance to any of these then the body of the work will look rather conservative, not to mention unremittingly hostile. Since I believe that a significant proportion of *Screen* readers will have an interest, however nuanced, in such conceptual frameworks, I want to clear the ground for a consideration of the texts in their own right. I clearly need to signal at various points how these texts provide problems for *some* of the concerns *Screen* represents. If I really saw myself as having an unruffled allegiance to all three projects I would be very confused indeed, since at various points they exhibit sharp paradigm conflicts, not to mention differences in approach and method. I suppose this is why Staiger calls for 'clinical' evidence? Staiger's 'post-structuralist critique' is for the most part an ironic device to say what David Bordwell says over and over: I am confused and unconstrained by scholarly conventions of consistency and logic in argument. (I may be so by default, but I am not so by intention.) I would prefer to respond to her in the context of a political economy of culture analysis, because this is where her criticisms are actually sited.

The first point that Staiger advances is that I seriously misread her account of the role of economic and ideological/signifying practices within 'the' Hollywood mode of production. To this end, she cites a specific instance which also combines a complaint about my (wilful) editing. She suggests that I generalise from a specific example, which concerns the development of an extensive division of labour in editing which is not cost-effective, in the sense of lowering wage bills. The point she is making here is worth making: if one were to equate cost reduction with capitalist control in film-making or in labour processes as a whole this would be seriously misleading. I would take the view, hardly original to Staiger or me, that the costs of production *in toto*, let alone wage costs, will be inflated not merely because of the technical division of labour (which, in any case, is not a separable phenomenon from questions of control), but because of the social division of labour in the workplace. In other words, the maintenance of capitalist control over a work process can be expensive. She can hardly complain if I use this as a general example of the thrust of her argument because that is what she is doing.

But she can complain if I use this general example in a way that misrepresents what she is trying to say. In the sentence I cite, as well as others, I read her as saying that 'style' is primary. In the following sentence which I regarded as redundant, she holds the opposite that economic determinants are primary. Readers must weigh this up for themselves but I read her succeeding statement not as reinstating the primacy of the economic, but rather sorting the relationship between the 'stylis-

tic' and the 'economic' around necessary and sufficient conditions. Style 'wins out' because if the economic is a necessary condition (a condition without which there would be no production at all) the 'stylistic' is a sufficient condition which would account for the specificity of *the* Hollywood mode of production or, for that matter, a given film text. This is what I think she means in distinguishing between *why* labour was divided and *how* it was divided, the how being 'influenced' by ideological/signifying practices. She further asserts that she does not equate the latter with 'style'. I will leave it for the reader's judgement to assess whether Staiger can validly claim that she is *not* operating a distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions in the subsequent uncited sentence. I can only take it as an example of her enthusiasm to distance herself from my reading that she asserts the economic is primary in her account. Moreover, I can only take her word that her original formulation was so economistic, so committed to a crude either/or notion of causality that she now finds it embarrassing. So she should, since if her text is to be read in that way its function in the 'Wisconsin project' is even more problematic than I thought. I had assumed, not the least on the basis of her sources, e.g., John Ellis, not to mention Raymond Williams, that she was attempting to argue for the salience of economic determinants in an account that preserved some determinative space for 'textual' autonomy.

Let me attack the substance of her point: I equate style with ideological/signifying practices. In point of fact, I think that it is *she* who accomplishes this equation. If the compound term ideological/signifying practices were comprehensively articulated in her contribution to *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* I think she would have a point, but the fact is that she only identifies as pertinent practices which are typified by group style (*CHC*, p 88) or 'the standard of the quality film'. Merely to hint at other discursive practices as being relevant without further elaboration either means that she thinks that these exhaust Ellis' four conditions of film practice, or that for purposes of argument in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* these are equated with stylistic factors. At any rate, her admission that she could not give ideological/signifying practices the kind of weight she might have desired merely reflects my perception of its underdevelopment. My point about the fruitfulness of the conflict between technical and aesthetic conceptions of efficiency was aimed entirely to point up a missed opportunity for examining the contradictions of different discursive practices. The fact that Staiger can argue that ideological and signifying practices should not be equated and yet deploy the awkward oxymoron 'ideological/signifying practices' epitomises the underdevelopment of these practices in her account.

The second way in which I allegedly misrepresent Staiger's account is through the claim that she has written a formalist treatment of mode of production literature. The attribution formalist (as she astutely observes) is primarily pointing towards a sociological or historical formalism. Namely, she applies the characteristics of the capitalist organisation of work in general, e.g., standardisation, differentiation and the

like, unproblematically, to the sphere of aesthetic production. An account of the latter would not only have to look at general imperatives derived from the organisation of the labour process by agents of capital outside Hollywood and how these are realised within Hollywood, but also at the forms of worker resistance and informal organisations that mediate such imperatives in general and the specific mechanisms by which workers within Hollywood offer resistance to control. Further, I do not hold that the methods of dividing labour are immediately linked to the exploitation of labour in isolation from ideological/signifying practices. On the contrary such practices – which often relate to *relations of domination*, rather than *exploitation*, among the workforce, e.g., male v female, skilled v unskilled, white v black, non-manual v manual, and so on – are the already pre-given mediating context of exploitation.

Obviously Staiger's account identifies specific mechanisms of control, e.g., the continuity script, which are pertinent to a more tightly contextualised account. But it remains too generalised or abstract in its thrust. What is needed is not *just* an account of the institutionalisation of the continuity script as an example of standardisation, but how it actually functioned at MGM or Warner Brothers. Such an account should stipulate, *inter alia*, the manner in which labour is subordinated to capital and the ideological and 'signifying' relationships through which this subordination is accomplished and reproduced. In other words, labour is not just exploited, it is given a place in an ideological schema which invariably mediates and seeks to legitimise exploitation, usually by dividing the workforce around industry specific categories like casual (costed to picture) and permanent (costed to studio overhead), 'creative' and technical, as well as more general relations of domination mentioned above. It is precisely because Staiger advances a material definition of mode of production and, at the same time, assimilates ideological/signifying practices to those immediately pertinent to the classical style that I argue that a material definition leads to the primacy of style – not *in general*, but in her account. Naturally enough we will not agree on the extent to which something is effective or 'assumed' in an account if it is mentioned.

In a similar vein, Staiger feels I unfairly delete the 'critical determinants' in the theory of spectatorship of social class, aesthetic tradition and ideology which would show a representation of a history which is not formalist. I agree it would. But in the context of a forward glance at the theory of spectatorship actually offered, I think it is not merely that these determinants are too complex to be treated in full – they surely are – but that the theory offered is on a number of points incompatible with an account of their effectivity. I have only to offer Bordwell's views on the relevance of ideology in this respect. As for appropriation, I beg pardon. I thought terms like 'social class', etc, were in the public domain long before any of us came to use them. Once again, I do not count a *mention* as an *articulation*.

Lastly, in the contrast between 'widely held' and 'hegemonically reproduced', I am inviting the reader to consider whether the account of

the widespread diffusion of classical norms details the contestation of their implementation – not as a once and for all installation of a self-regulating, open system – but as a recurrently challenged formation that negotiates its conditions of dominance. I am prepared to accept that Staiger wishes to offer such an account. But I am not convinced she does here.

## VI

The next prong of Staiger's rebuttal is the conception of class conflict in film history. The first point she raises concerns the mode of production. The thrust of my comments is clear enough; I think that her use of the term is overly productivist, concerned with work order and the like. I would hold that an adequate characterisation of 'the' Hollywood mode of production – if there is one mode – would entail an assessment of the inter-relationships between production, distribution and exhibition, which would detail: (a) the relationship between various capitals such as 'banks' and 'movies' – relations of superordination or subordination – or even the same capital formation operating as producer or distributor and exhibiter, e.g., MGM and Loews; (b) relationships between the forms of labour in production, distribution and exhibition, which are not inconsequential for the way labour is subordinated at the point of production, e.g., the role of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees in Hollywood labour relations.

Staiger wishes to flag these relations as pertinent to the 'industry' level, which may be contrasted to the more molecular conception of mode of production with which she operates. My problem with this is twofold: first, the character of the industry level and concretely, the place of a specific production company within it, cannot be separated from the mode of production in her sense. What is telling in her account is her failure to consider the dimension of formal and real subsumption, and particularly in the case of the latter the modalities of the control exercised within the formation of the labour process. On my reading of the studio period, it is precisely the relationships between sectors, and relatedly forms of finance, that gives the work organisation of this or that studio its particular form. This fact is all the more paradoxical given the specific systems of management which Staiger delineates so valuably. (It is also in this connection that my remarks about the relevance of particular production personnel need to be considered.) Second, it is important to recognise that if Hollywood should be seen as a service industry, as Elsaesser suggests (and Staiger agrees), then one consequence of this undoubtedly correct position has been a dynamic prioritisation of the *means of realisation* over the *means of production*.

To this one must add considerations of the nature of film as commodity, as a barer of multiple and multiplying use values; its intensive implication (at least, as a mass commodity) in a short cycle of accumulation; its mode of consumption as a service which is only validated as a use

value after it is consumed compared to the opposite relationship with, for instance, cars. These kinds of factors, which demand attention to the specificity of film as an aesthetic commodity, militate against any simple translation of categories derived chiefly from the study of the manufacture of highly functionalised commodities to film production. This is another example of formalism.

As for the source of finance making a difference to the character of a film, I think this is an empirical possibility in so far as the source of finance, e.g., debt financing, introduces a specific dynamic to the realisation process or, in phenomenal terms, to the relationship between production costs and profitability as typified by amortisation schedules – an accountancy device for identifying successful or unsuccessful rates of earning. Such a dynamic affects in turn the nature of the production process and the extent of its production values. In this regard, I need only to point to Paul Kerr's work on the 'B' *film noir*.<sup>20</sup> In general terms what is an exploitation movie, if not, like pornography, a reductively functionalised text that raises finance on the basis of a quick rate of return?

If Staiger's point is that such an account is not to hand, I agree. But to cite Robert Sklar's *Movie Made America*<sup>21</sup> as foreclosing this enquiry is complacent to say the least. What Sklar is doing, as he does repeatedly in that text, is to mount a consumer sovereignty thesis so essential to his kind of cultural history. Since she finds Raymond Williams so illuminating – as we all do – I suggest she considers the potential conflict between the market and ideological needs of capitalism outlined in his study *Culture*<sup>22</sup>.

## VII

Staiger's final point is that I hold a workerist view of Hollywood labour relations, which equates employee status with class consciousness. Further, since I do this I ask of her what she, with her grasp of US labour history, does not wish to give: a class-centred history of Hollywood. It will doubtless surprise her that I agree, in broad terms, with the points she makes here. I do not equate employee resistance at the point of production with class consciousness in the traditional sense. Least of all in Hollywood, which is a classic case of a divided workforce in which relations of domination overdetermine relations of exploitation and, because of the Guild structure and the operation of unions as labour brokers in a casualised labour market, contradictory class locations and intra-class conflicts abound. Again, I agree that 'labourers' ideologies of quality, particularly given the skill density of the labour process, are the site in which employer/employee conflicts manifest themselves. Where I seem to differ is that I see a need to relate these conflicts to the underlying structure of exploitation. I would want to argue that it is the underlying structure of exploitation that determines the kind of stakes that intra- and inter-union rivalry and employer/employee conflict seeks to

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Kerr, 'Out of What Past? Notes on the B Film Noir', *Screen Education* nos 32-33, Autumn 1979/80, pp 45-65.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America, A Cultural History of American Movies*, New York, Vintage Books, 1975.

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture*, London, Fontana, 1981, especially chapter 4.

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appropriate and retain. I would expect Staiger's account to explore in more detail the range of ideologies of quality or what is suppressed, if it is, by the norms of the classical style. Pursuing this line would – and this is the point – problematise the thesis of the fundamental unity of the classical system.

I would also suggest that an adequate study of technical discourse or, indeed, the ideology of those who unproblematically endorse the official norms of this literature, needs to be set in the context of a substantive analysis of the labour process. To this line of analysis it is probably desirable to add a comparative analysis of the notions of quality uttered by industry leaders, and those inscribed in advertising, publicity and the like as discursive practices. I have a suspicion that Staiger has this in mind. I disagree that this can be assumed as 'in' *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

As to the claimed equation of employee resistance with class struggle, I think I have said enough on that score: my point is not that Staiger should offer a workerist version of Hollywood, but rather that she plays down the points of resistance to management objectives. Skilled workers are notoriously difficult to locate within a workerist schema or, indeed, within an account that argues that the 'real' issues are only wage-related. Very often, conceptions of quality seem paramount, with the question of whether these are 'tactical' or integral counters in the wage-effort bargain practically irrelevant. At the very least, there seems, on my reading of Hollywood labour relations, a strong presumption that the below the line costs of movie production would have been lower if standards of quality, which relate to the determination of factors such as wage scales (e.g., 'golden hours'), had been as containable or as agreed as the notion of 'the' classical style suggests.

Two more points seem worthy of mention: Staiger quotes me (I, p 80) as offering the opinion that growing demands for quality in production are not considered in the light of their potential to clash or conflict. She can point to some references in her text where this possibility is mentioned. Let me admit that if I meant *only* a clash between, for example, clarity and stardom, then her mention of this potential challenges my observation. The real problem is that my original formulation was ambiguous, because it was the clash between *different conceptions of clarity*, verisimilitude and so on, that I had in mind as the general context of argument suggests.

Next, the question of pseudo-closure, which she and Bordwell find a telling absence in my account. I am quite happy to have this pointed out. But I admit I took Bordwell literally when he wrote (in this case, with respect to authorial intrusion) 'so powerful is the classical paradigm that it regulates what may violate it' (*CHC*, p 81). More substantially, the notion of pseudo-closure needs to be considered in the light of the concept of 'excess'. As I understand it, the term has three possible meanings: (1) the notion of a chronic destabilisation of the relationship between the signifier and the signified in favour of the play of signifiers down an 'interminable' syntagmatic chain; (2) the notion of figural



excess, as proposed for example by Lyotard, which directs attention to the impact of the *texture of the text* on the perception of the text itself; (3) as the inherence in any given text of a subtext or suppressed Other, as in, for example, 'colonial discourse'. Whatever the relationship between these various senses of excess, the point I wish to emphasise is that from the perspective of any of them, Bordwell's notion of closure, combined as it is anyway with the formal exclusion of a consideration of 'excess', is vestigial to say the least.

Lastly, Staiger finds an internal contradiction in my remarks on the treatment of the star and the *film noir* and my comments on style as suppressing the constitutive role of meaning. The two statements are not at odds as she seems to think. Treating genre as a constitutive moment would not exclude the effectivity of discursive practices after the moment of constitution, but it would establish a different mode of analysis than that employed in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

## VIII

Kristin Thompson has interesting things to say about the pre-history of publication of the texts under review. I nevertheless stand by my assessment of the relevant research facilities and funding available to US and UK scholars in this field, which is not intended to discredit British contributions. As a matter of fact, I don't say that *British Cinema History* or *British Cinema Now* are speculative rather than conclusive. I say that the essay form is of necessity provisional. That I am not unusual in this opinion is clear from the following:

*The academic study of the cinema is still in its infancy in Britain. And as the opening chapter in this book argues, what serious film history there is sometimes suffers from a rather narrow and restricted focus.*

*This book is not intended to be a definitive history of the British cinema, even if such a history were possible to produce. Rather it attempts to illuminate certain key developments and movements in the history of the British cinema through nineteen essays. . . . The selection has been determined by what seemed to us to be important or interesting; necessarily, it has also been determined by what is possible in an area where there is only a limited amount of research activity.<sup>23</sup>*

Thompson seems to operate, like Bordwell, with a rather agonistic view of academic enquiry. If I think 'Grand Theory' can be useful, according to her, I necessarily deprecate the essay form. What I think – as the review makes clear – is that the tension between these modes of enquiry is more desirable than either approach in isolation. For an either/or cast of mind this is doubtless profoundly unsatisfying. As for denigrating the work of 'fine' historians, which is certainly not my intention, I suppose this would depend on a careful appraisal of what she considers fine in historiography against what I consider fine.

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<sup>23</sup> James Curran and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema History*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, p 1.

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Turning to the matter of appropriation, Thompson is as forthright as she thinks I am in claiming I wish to assimilate their work to a Marxist perspective. She is astute enough in recognising my interest in such a perspective. But I think the thrust of my review is to show how their account is not appropriable in the way she suggests. She complains that I never suggest that 'future historians' should go out and confront the archives. This is because I take it for granted that an adequate refutation would require doing exactly that. In the short term, an evaluation of their work will have to rest on the criterion of internal consistency and an entirely different set of criteria that relate to its usefulness as a positive heuristic programme. I take it those who pursue the latter will be prepared to some extent to live with the former. My closing remarks were pointing towards this possibility. As a matter of personal opinion, however, I doubt that a Marxist could consistently make piecemeal use of their work in this way. As to whether I am keen to tackle the labour of refutation, my answer is the same as before. Evidently, I am keen enough to turn from my own research to undertake an extended review.

The point about aesthetic pertinence is simply this: that a methodology premised on such a criterion cannot enter a claim to have defined *the* classical style *sui generis*, unless it is assumed that style is only an aesthetic phenomenon.

As regards the discussion of *Citizen Kane*, I am happy to agree with Thompson that if one analyses the same scene with different questions in mind one produces different answers. What else? I was using her example to emphasise how an analysis which seeks to establish the integrity of the continuity system (and by extension, the classical system) rests on a high level of abstraction from the text. Clearly, she agrees with me.

Finally, Thompson has it that I think the criteria for successful innovation that she outlines are obvious and uninformative. That is not what I actually say. I doubt that such criteria, which are interesting in themselves, can be cited as evidence of the pervasiveness of the classical style. In fact, this is to confuse the characteristics of the medium with a specific function or functional complex. I think this is an unresolved tension in their account as I said earlier. But according to David Bordwell, distinguishing the medium and a function is intrinsic to a formalist analysis.

Now it is time to make an exit. In view of the pronounced *ad hominem* tenor of my respondents' remarks, I can allow myself a personal observation. My objective in undertaking this review for *Screen*, was to bring to the readership's attention a body of work that was in many ways outside of the mainstream of film and cultural studies in this country. In this regard, and in all modesty, I think I can claim to have achieved that.

**SCREEN: Reviewing the Woman's Picture**

The recent publication of Christine Gledhill's anthology of key essays on melodrama, *Home Is Where The Heart Is* (British Film Institute), and Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire* (Indiana University Press), as well as a related season of events organised in 1988 by the British Film Institute, offers an opportunity to take stock of the debates which have retrieved film melodrama from critical opprobrium and reconstructed it as an object of film theory. These have moved on from the early work on Minnelli and Sirk, in which melodrama was assessed for its capacity to contain or expose social conflict. In the wake of studies of the gaze, the theory of the genre has developed in relation to the issues of cinematic address and spectatorship and the question of their gendered character. This has motivated the turn to that subsection of melodrama, the woman's film, because of its address to a female spectator and hence its representation of 'woman' in a space not governed by the dynamics of the male gaze and the fetishising of the woman's image. This issue would address the adequacy of this newly 'classic' paradigm, focussing on concepts of the fetish (simulation) and the masquerade (dissimulation); cross-gender viewing and identification; the modern recycling of romantic conventions; and gay and lesbian appropriations of the genre.

Submissions are requested by April 1, 1988.

**SCREEN: The Last Special Issue on 'Race'**

Questions of 'race', ethnicity and cultural differences have been at the forefront of recent developments in film practices and theoretical speculation. The emergence of new black independent films in Britain; the appeal of crossover and mainstream movies inflected by an interest in 'otherness' (e.g., *My Beautiful Laundrette*) and 'minority' broadcasting, all point to important shifts and trends in contemporary cinema and television. But why has this arisen in the '80s? The corresponding proliferation of theory on 'colonial discourse' and debates on 'Third Cinema' have emphasised the limits of Euro/ethno-centrism in Film Studies. But what impact has this had outside academia on practices such as reviewing, criticism or film-making itself?

We are therefore calling for papers which critically reassess historical and contemporary configurations of 'race' in film culture. In particular, we encourage concrete analyses of theories and practices which address: the aesthetics of black/Third World film; images of 'difference' in Hollywood or the Euro-American avant-garde; different positions occupied by black/white spectators and audiences; intersections of sexual and 'racial' difference and their implications for feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives; formations of productions, exhibition and reception in different national/international traditions. Called the 'last special issue' in the belief that value distinctions between 'centre' and 'margin' are becoming more difficult to sustain, we especially welcome articles which address the salience of 'race' in the cultural crisis of modernity.

Submissions are requested by June 1, 1988.

Inquiries of submissions to: the Editor, *Screen*, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL, England.